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ABSTRACT

RECONSTRUCTING JUSTICE IN THE LAND: HOW URBAN EVANGELICAL CONGREGATIONS IN COTONOU AND PORTO-NOVO CAN RESPOND TO THE ESCALATING PHENOMENON OF ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIORS

by

Mathieu Sègbégnon Gnonhossou

The current context of escalating antisocial behaviors in Bénin, in general, and in its major cities, in particular, demands that urban evangelical churches be freed from whatever is holding them from offering an appropriate response to the situation. Biblical exploration of eighth century BC Israel and Judah coupled with earliest Christian movement's responses to social ills point to the reality that the fight against injustices in urban settings is an ancient scriptural tradition. When read from the perspective of current African theology of reconstruction, the narratives of Hosea's and Amos's prophecies compel Christians to engage the very roots of the plight that weak and powerless people now face in Cotonou and Porto-Novo. To this end, Christian congregations must be prepared to engage the failing voices that have tried and are still trying to respond to the social ill of antisocial behaviors in a critical manner.

This study provides an example of such an engagement. It discusses available materials pertaining to responding to antisocial behaviors in social sciences. Based on a critical theological assessment of counseling psychology and criminal justice approaches to the issue, this study offers a comprehensive alternative to existing methods. Therapeutic discipleship, holistic ministry, narrative methodology in counseling and

justice works, and a deeper look at prison ministries, which address prisons' dysfunctions and injustices, constitute the essence of the approach offered in this study. Taking in account the prevenient aspect of God's grace, the alternative provided here goes along with the form of traditional Béninese restorative approach to justice making, which has been eroded in favor of the Western punitive justice system. The content of such approach is transformed based on God's method of providing personal and interpersonal healing to humanity through Jesus Christ. The social engagement suggested in this study will help urban evangelical congregations in Bénin offer an alternative response to the problem of antisocial behaviors and thus participate in God's continuing actions of social healing and restoration.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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Mathieu Sègbégnon Gnonhossou

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by

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

My brother Damien wrote to me a day after I spoke with him regarding my research paper on the phenomenon of antisocial behaviors in Bénin:

> I was not able to go to Cotonou. Why? After I was done talking with you on the phone I went outside only to realize that my motorbike that I kept at a security station has been stolen.... [T]he two thieves are currently in the pains of corporal chastisements at the detention center of Ouando and are waiting to be deferred on this Thursday. I will therefore be regaining my motorbike on Thursday. The testimony is so strong. God is not visible but his actions and miracles are. (Gnonhossou, E-mail)

After regaining his motorbike, he wrote, "Concerning the motorbike, I got it back. The two thieves have been firmly condemned in my presence at the court last Friday for two years of prison." This experience reminded me of 11 April 2002 when my wife (then fiancée) and I left a cybercafé in Cotonou only to find out that our motorcycle had been stolen. Unlike my brother Damien, my wife and I never recovered our stolen property. Further, in August 2006 my older sister and another sister in Christ were robbed while returning from a house-based discipleship. While my family thanks God that my sister and her friend did not experience more severe suffering such as sexual abuse and/or shooting, the fact that these robbers took away their motorbike and their purses is still heartbreaking. In this case as in my brother's, one person was apprehended and is now in prison. As I think about these recent events, my thoughts go further back to mid-1986 when armed robbers awakened my family (parents and siblings) on a quiet night and attempted to kill my mother after they had emptied our household of our important belongings. Those persons responsible for this crime were convicted and imprisoned but later freed without any restorative action between them and us. These few examples

provide proof that antisocial behaviors that disturb social peace and harmony have long plagued Bénin. The only state-sanctioned response to such problems is the penal system. Careful consideration of history and contemporary life in Bénin suggests that churches do not provide a distinctive response to the situation. Nevertheless, as this work argues, those people who claim the name of Christ should not react to social problems with indifference.

This research project purports to establish the extent to which evangelical churches in the urban context of Cotonou and Porto-Novo respond to antisocial behaviors in their respective communities. Current convictions regarding the centrality of churches in the reconstruction of African societies as shared by many African scholars and pastors formed the background of this study of the roles played by pastors in two urban areas in the Republic of Bénin.[1]

The Problem

Headlines around the world feature socially disturbing behaviors. As such, crime, violence, aggression, and victimization are critical contemporary social ills that people see, hear, remember, and regret deeply. Still, Christians attempt to avoid such problems by failing to act restoratively in response to such social ills. The Republic of Bénin, a small West African country, provides a troubling example of this trend. Despite the penal system's efforts to combat the phenomenon, its growth is widely uncontested. In the

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[1]Bénin is a small French-speaking country of 112.622 km^2 in Africa and represents the formerly powerful African kingdom called Danhomè. The name was changed in 1975 under the leadership of former communist president Mathieu Kérékou. Located in West Africa in the Guinea Gulf between the western side of Republic of Togo and the eastern side of the Republic of Nigeria, Bénin Republic is a country not to be confused with the Nigerian city called Bénin. The Republic of Bénin is bordered on the north by the Republic of Niger and Burkina Faso and on the south by the Atlantic Ocean (see Appendix A).

Western world that most African countries attempt to imitate in many ways of life and culture, repressive methods are the main response to such a social phenomenon. In like manner Bénin's criminal justice system is the main agency addressing the problem of criminality at the present time (Chacha and Hounkponou 10-26; Gaga 23-24; Lissanou 13-23; Gnonhossou, *Etudes* 15-24). In addition to the aforementioned repressive method, Western society has turned to mental health professionals to fix social ills including those related to violence, crime, and aggression. Within the world of mental health professionals, the term *personality* is used often to describe normality and abnormality in people who express antisocial behaviors. The expression *personality*, however, can be an unclear, confusing, and enigmatic concept. Given that urban areas such as Cotonou and Porto-Novo are now exposed to the use of *personality* due to the influences of modern education and mass media, the possibility of responding to antisocial behaviors must be clarified.

Some people believe that the term refers to those parts of the human person that professional mental health practitioners are unable to change. The difficulty of changing antisocial personality is readily acknowledged from the standpoint of a Western psychological perspective. Discussion of antisocial behaviors fits within the overall discussion of psychological or personality disorders as highlighted in the American *Diagnostic Statistic Manual Fourth Edition Text Revision* (DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association). Whereas the concept of personality differs in an indigenous sense in Bénin, modern fascination for Western ideas makes the concept more unclear. For this reason a critical reflection is necessary for the purpose of clarifying the importance of focusing on antisocial behaviors rather than on antisocial personality.

According to the American Psychiatric Association's DSM-IV-TR, a personality disorder occurs when "personality traits are inflexible and maladaptive and cause significant functional impairment or subjective distress" (686). As such a personality disorder is an enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectation of the individual's culture, is pervasive and inflexible, has an onset in adolescence or early adulthood, is stable over time, and leads to distress or impairment (686). The DSM-IV-TR outlines ten personality disorders grouped in three clusters. Cluster A includes paranoid, schizoid, and schizotypal personality disorders. Cluster B is comprised of antisocial, borderline, histrionic, and narcissistic personality disorders. Finally, Cluster C includes avoidant, dependent, and obsessive-compulsive personality disorders. This clustering has not met with wide approval; further, individuals can present with co-occurring personality disorders from different clusters (Lee 5).

According to the current manual of mental disorders, persons with antisocial behaviors are said to be suffering from psychopathy, sociopathy, or dissocial personality disorder and are characterized by "a pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others that begins in childhood or early adolescence and continues into adulthood" (American Psychiatric Association 701). O. F. Kernberg and E. Caligor suggest that in psychoanalytic exploration the antisocial personality shows a severe underlying paranoid trend coupled with a total incapacity for any nonexploitive investment in significant others. Further, these authors describe people with such disorders saying, "The total absence of capacity for guilt feelings, or of any concern for self and others, an incapacity to identify with any moral or ethical value in self and others, and an incapacity to project a dimension of personal future characterize the

antisocial personality disorder" (140-41). The diagnosis is appropriate when the individual is at least eighteen years and has a history of conduct disorder before age fifteen. The progression of conduct disorder is generally understood as a path to development of antisocial personality disorder (ASPD). The DSM-IV-TR diagnostic criteria for ASPD are as follows:

√ Since the age of fifteen having had a disregard for and violating the rights of others, i.e., those rights considered normal by the local culture as indicated by at least three of the following:

- ✓ Repeated acts that could lead to arrest,
- ✓ Conning for pleasure or profit, repeated lying, or the use of aliases,
- ✓ Failure to plan ahead or being impulsive,
- ✓ Repeated assaults on others,
- ✓ Reckless when to their own or others' safety,
- ✓ Poor work behavior or failure to honor financial obligations, and/or
- ✓ Rationalizing the pain they inflict on others;

√ Being at least eighteen years in age;

√ Showing evidence of a conduct disorder, with its onset before the age of fifteen; and,

√ Symptoms not due to another mental disorder (American Psychological Association 706).

Once diagnosed, popular psychological techniques offer little to no hope for transformation of persons dealing with identified problematic behaviors.

As a type of personality disorder, a diagnosis of ASPD generally refers to people who disturb social peace and harmony through their behaviors. The diagnostic manual seems to assert a fixed opinion regarding source and causes for this disorder, namely it "appears to be associated with *low socioeconomic status and urban* [emphasis mine] settings" (American Psychological Association 703). Therefore, clinicians assessing persons with deviant behaviors must "consider the social and economic context in which the behaviors occur" (704). Failure to take this factor into account can only amount to an ineffective diagnosis followed with unhelpful treatment.

ASPD generally features violence and criminal behaviors; nevertheless, the DSM-IV-TR states that ASPD must be distinguished from other disorders with manifestations similar to those of ASPD. Examples of such disorders are conduct disorder, substance-related disorder, schizophrenia or a manic episode, narcissistic personality disorder, histrionic personality disorder, borderline personality disorders, paranoid personality disorder and adult antisocial behavior (AAB; American Psychiatric Association 705). One example of how ASPD can be confusing is how practitioners are expected to distinguish it from AAB. ASPD, the DSM-IV-TR says, "must be distinguished from criminal behavior undertaken for gain that is not accompanied by the personality features characteristic of this disorder [AAB]" (705).

Along with this distinction Adult Antisocial Behavior must be differentiated from ASPD because AAB represents "criminal, aggressive, or others antisocial behavior that comes to clinical attention but that does not meet the full criteria for" ASPD (American Psychiatric Association 705). Practitioners must judge whether or not observed "antisocial personality traits are inflexible, maladaptive, and persistent and cause

significant functional impairment or subjective distress" before an accurate diagnosis of ASPD can be applied (705-06). L. Kaylor reports about the general view as held by experts:

> There is a distinction between antisocial behaviors and antisocial personality. One does not need to have such a disorder to commit a crime, and one does not need to be a criminal to have an ASPD. What differentiates people with ASPD from other criminals is their egocentricity, shallow affect, manipulativeness, or lack of empathy or remorse. (249)

According to this view, though they tend to be similar, ASPD and AAB differ because one does not necessarily imply the other. However, this study assumes that treatment needs not be based on making such a difference and that the presence of criminal actions is enough for appropriate interventions. The theoretical perspective as explained by Kaylor places the clinician in a position of "evidence checker" before he or she can properly diagnose an individual either with ASPD or with AAB. In practice this diagnostic search must occur before the clinician can decide on a given therapeutic course of action. The reason for the DSM-IV-TR's concern regarding differentiation between other similar disorders such as AAB and ASPD remains unclear. Concentrating on finding appropriate ways for responding to violence, aggression, criminal behaviors, or other antisocial behaviors that disturb social peace and harmony without focusing on distinguishing diagnoses such AAB from ASPD is a better course of action. The preoccupation with distinguishing ASPD-related criminals or violent behaviors from psychoses can be an unnecessary task according to Kaylor: "The DSM-IV does not clearly distinguish antisocial personality traits from antisocial behavior" (256). Axes I and II will likely merge in future editions of the DSM because contemporary empirical literatures assert that personality and psychopathology are so intimately intertwined that

distinguishing between Axis I and Axis II syndromes is difficult to sustain because the spectrum of distinction transcends both Axes and normal-range personality variations (Kruger and Tackett 126). The present study opts rather for an intervention that does not consider such a distinction but takes into consideration whatever antisocial expression needs attention.

The service done by the DSM-IV's psychotherapy remains at the level of diagnosis and insights into an antisocial person's life. The unsuitability and inefficiency of such an approach is due to the complicated notion of personality in relation to treatment. Some experts recognize this reality and call for a recourse to an eclectic approach (Lester and Van Voorhis 125). Current emphasis on eclectic treatment points to a problem for Bénin's context given that in the area of professional counseling Bénin's academic training, which is heavily based on the French educational system, is still largely based on the Freudian models of treatment.

If antisocial behaviors, understood based on the unclear notion of personality, are due to some unchanging parts in those who perform them, then existing treatments, including the nontherapeutic ones, are the only available solutions. To this effect, several experts, quoting Western literature and social realities, now concur regarding the ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system's ability to deter antisocial behaviors (Colson 4-6; Colson and Van Ness 29-34; Marshall 14; McGuire 184-88, 202-03; M. Taylor 18-31, 50-54; Soering 11-13, 18-22). Likewise, the ineffectiveness of the Western mental health system response to this phenomenon has come under consideration by some concerned scholars (Jones 14-16, 30-41; Marshall 100-04). The next lines aim at

defining personality in a way that suits the realities of Bénin in terms of culture and the need for discipleship and healing.

The urban context of Cotonou and Porto-Novo now facilitates the rapid spread of Western approaches to life problems through modern media, academic education, and professional training. The seriousness of the situation regarding antisocial behaviors in Bénin and the unsatisfactory results of the available Western approaches to responding to the issue begs for more thoughtful reflections. Such an urban context requires a critical appraisal of those modern approaches based on Christian faith and informed by Bénin indigenous insights.

British missionary and anthropologist Geoffrey Parrinder acknowledges the existence of a distinctive West African and Dahomean notion of personality (*West African Psychology* 8-9, 29-44). He discusses such a notion of personality as unfit with the Western notions of personality while also recognizing that "there is a growing syncretism and absorption of foreign ideas" (6). One basic difference is that the idea of personality in traditional West Africa in general is a religio-spiritual concept itself embedded in three or four inseparable yet distinct parts (or souls) in the structure of the human being (31). The first characteristic of personality in West African thought is theological. In that sense, personality is part of a number of a human soul, which "come from God, but [which] do not form God," and are rather "subject to God, and have no power of their own without him" (31). Parrinder explicates the distinction of personality-soul with other souls:

> There gradually emerges a distinction between what might be called the soul or personality, and a higher soul or spirit. Beyond this is often a guardian genius or over-soul. The personality-soul is more outward,

> human, and individual. The spirit-soul is inward, and more detached from the vicissitudes of mortal existence. (31)

In traditional Bénin, personality is called *ye* and constitutes a personal soul, which can also be called a voice because one's voice makes one distinctive. At birth a newborn already has his voice (personality), which marks his identity and then grows gradually to distinguish him afterward (39). An important factor related to personality is that a variety of meanings such as power, virtue, effect, law, imprecation, and vital force (i.e., power of every divinity, of all animate beings or things) are attached to it (21). Personality, then, cannot be conceived of as static or unchanging but as something on the move, something that is able to move and be moved. The name one bears is also related to the concept of personality. West Africans believe that one's name is an important part of one's personality because a vital connection exists between the name and the life of a person (26). "No name is a mere name. There are public and private names … because the name expresses the individual character of a [person].... It is not a mere handle, but shares in the spiritual reality of a [person's] being" (24). Reconstructing someone's personality may call for a collaborative work on the person's name, either by resuscitating a good value attached to a name that has been abandoned or simply by rejecting one and adopting a new name.

A further powerful idea related to personality is that of destiny or fate. In Bénin, an individual's destiny is known through a process of divination called Ifa. Parrinder says, "So important is the revelation of this fate held to be that it is often called the fourth soul" (*West African Psychology* 62). Once revealed, the fate associated with an individual's personality "is not individual to men only, for it is also concerned with his

family, wives, children and dependents" (62-63). Thus comes the social character of personality, which goes beyond an individualistic notion of personality.

The aforementioned discussion allows for the conclusion that traditional Bénin's notion of personality conveys a dynamic, moving, and movable notion of a human person with important religious and social dimensions. Such a view of personality opens up the possibility for healthy interventions pertaining to the reconstruction of human personality to bear such dimensions as well (i.e., socioreligious dimensions). Such a vision of personality is at odd with the Western notion of personality, which hardly allows one to believe that an antisocial person can change. On the contrary, in an African context such as Bénin, religious rituals integrated within the framework of the discipling of such persons can result in rehabilitation because they aim at giving an antisocial person a new and better story in which to live.

The Present Struggle

The frequency of criminal occurrences in contemporary Bénin comes as a surprise to many in comparison to premodern social life. During the long time he spent in Dahomey (actual Bénin) with his wife, Parrinder remarked that antisocial behaviors were rare. He affirms the rarity of antisocial behaviors during his time, though at the exception of a car theft involving a foreign employee in a city called Dassa:

> [I]t must be said that in twenty years in Africa we never had any burglaries, or lost any money or property from our houses. In villages we slept with doors and windows open, and left them unlocked if we walked away. (*In the Belly* 67)

This rarity of antisocial behaviors has come to pass and is now replaced by a frequency of antisocial behaviors because many cases and instances of criminality exist in Bénin these days. In a 1997 study on juvenile delinquency in Cotonou, Micheline Agoli-Agbo found

several cases of criminality reported to the civil prison. These cases involved both men and women ranging in age from fourteen to twenty-four years. Men made up the largest proportion of those cases. Agoli-Agbo found that 5 percent of the detained persons were women and 5 to 10 percent of the convicted persons were women. Even though Bénin law recognizes criminal infractions only by those of seventeen years old or older, younger persons have committed several cases of grave infractions. Given the intensity of the crimes, these minors were imprisoned as adults. For instance, in 2001, fifteen youth aged sixteen were incarcerated for association with gang activities, theft, and escapism. Eight fifteen-year-olds were condemned for theft, beating, and wounding others; five fourteen-year-olds were arrested for similar causes and for gang association; and, one thirteen-year-old and one eleven-year-old were arrested for stealing a large sum of money (4). In 2001, 30 percent of those incarcerated persons were less than twenty-five years old. More than ever before, city dwellers' senses of insecurity are becoming higher and higher in the city due to increasing numbers of juvenile delinquency and the increasing intensity of such minors' violent actions. Common infractions include shoplifting, robbery, selling stolen goods, offenses against other persons (usually violent), physical violence, possession and selling of narcotics or other drugs, and homicide and murder (4).

A recent study in Bénin confirmed that "the criminal phenomenon has grown over the last few years in our cities and particularly in Cotonou and Porto Novo where a climate of insecurity characterized by the multiplicity of criminal acts reigns" (Gaga 6). Louis Gaga identifies specific places in Cotonou and Porto-Novo where criminal acts tend to happen. In Cotonou, crimes occur most often in highly frequented places, in isolated areas, or in ill-electrified zones such as marché Dantokpa, marché Ganhi, marché

Saint-Michel, marché Gbégamey, the seaport area, and areas in close proximity to hotels. In addition to those areas, the quarters of Zongo, Xwlacodji, Jonquet, Akpakpa Dodome, Akpakpa Abattoir, Fifadji, Fidjrosse, Zogbohoue, and Agla are often places of refuge for delinquents and drug dealers (8). In Porto-Novo some areas of concern are Wlogou, Dowa, Djegan Kpevi, Djegan Daho, Agbokou I, Agbokou II, Djilado, and Gbodje. These places are generally considered the most dangerous places in Porto-Novo (8). According to statistical data gathered from Cotonou's and Porto-Novo's police stations as reported by Gaga, most socially disturbing behaviors consist of assaults on people's belonging and assaults on some targeted people. According to Gaga this situation of high criminality can be traced as far back as 1990 and 1991, during the early years of Bénin's embrace of democracy as an alternative political philosophy to Marxism-Leninism (10).

Toward the end of the year 2005, large numbers of voices were claiming it as the "the year of criminality." Indeed, several days during that year were marked by significant criminal cases that led to material and financial losses and even deaths. Jean Dossou tells about how gangs of thugs attacked the pharmaceutical company of Bénin, taking away a Toyota vehicle, computers, pharmaceutical products, and around 120 million FCFA[2] and killing the three private security agents who were keeping the house (Dossou). Dela Fidele Tamadaho wrote around the middle of the year to call on the country's authorities' attention following several cases of antisocial behaviors. Referring to thefts, murders and other acts of vandalism, he says, "Those acts are becoming so frequent that they are part of the daily experiences of Bénineses. From day to day, the

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[2] FCFA is the acronym for Franc de la Communauté Financière Africaine [Money of African Financial Community]. It is the currency shared by a number of French-speaking African countries that are former colonies of France.

losses are increasing and statistics of victims are getting higher" (Tamadaho). Other significant 2005 crimes included the highly planned holdup of fifteen millions FCFA ($30,000.00) at Vèdoko (Alofa) and holdup of ten million FCFA ($20,000.00) at Godomey (Tossou). Citizens' call for tougher security measures allowed for a short period of tranquility. While many people hoped that the year 2006 would be better, that year left in the memory of many, other severe criminal occurrences. Abdourahmane Touré recalls two previous occurrences in Sèmè-Kpoji (close to Porto-Novo) and Logozohouè (close to Cotonou) with significant losses, wounded persons, and murders. He describes the terrible death of a car driver in the hands of gangs and calls on the authorities to "take strong measures to secure the streets and send away those gangs who have resumed their activities" (Touré). Perhaps the greatest cause of fear came from a coup orchestrated by certain organized gangs who attacked a bank office car behind the palace of the president of the Republic of Bénin. This event that claimed the death of two persons and wounded many happened just a day after another something similar happened in the area and caused the death of a girl (Houngbédji, "Braquage"). Other significant crimes in the same year were the holdups of the Bénin ambassador in Belgium on his visit to Cotonou (Gandaho), and of the mayor of Toffo, the killing of two persons and the wounding of four persons in Cotonou (United Nations Office). The most frequent crimes of 2006 included delinquency, illegal drug use, armed robbing of taxi and private drivers, and homicide (Houngbo).

Gero Amoussouga's work repeats and adds to the previous list of crimes, such as, "corruption and embezzlement, traffic of influence, drug dealing, fiscal evasion, child trafficking," all of which have grown these days with the rise of "organized criminality"

(2). Indeed, the level of organized criminality in Bénin can be justified by the December 2006 successful attempt armed robbing for about thirty minutes in an area that is supposed to be the most secure in the country, that is, near the national president's and the national defense minister's house offices, which are also close to the national military camp (Boubacar). The Overseas Security Advisory Council's (OSAC) 2007 Crime and Safety Report is right in its assessment:

> The overall crime rate remained high in Benin during 2006. Petty crime is common in all parts of the country, and violent crime such as armed robbery, murder, and carjacking are common as well. All of these crimes occur at a high rate nationwide. Armed robberies are usually committed at knife—or machetepoint, but more frequently hand guns are being used by criminals. (OSAC)

Journalist Brice Houssou expresses the concern of Bénin citizens:

> People in villages and in cities are threatened by individuals with "no faith and no law" who are troubling their peace; so much so that there is no day where one does not register a case of hold-up. Thieves and armed robbers, these partisans of least efforts and socially divorced change strategies every time that one of theirs come under the control of the local and national police force. They have proven their brilliancy recently by succeeding in running away from the Civil Prison of Cotonou during the day, in a spectacular way.

Houssou's and Boubacar's work constitute an indictment on the failure of current measures to fight the crime phenomenon in Bénin. The population has responded to such failure defensively, with the outright killing of any criminal whom they catch and preventively, by putting in place a community-initiated public security system, "an initiative that proves that the population count less and less on security forces to insure their security for them" (Houssou). Accounting for two recent cases of what he calls "private justice," enforced on two criminals who have been killed by the offended population, Aziz Fondo explains that the majority of Béninese has decided to refer

neither to the police nor to other security forces in order to decide the fate of thieves. They thus pretend to fill in the "slowness of the administration of the judiciary system and the incapacity of the police to inflict upon [criminals] the punishment that these latter deserve."

The recent United Nations Human Settlements Programme's report includes Bénin's most important cities in the analyses of slums and the phenomenon of urban poverty and crimes (249-89). Thus, Bénin's cities, in general, and Cotonou and Porto-Novo, in particular, share the same realities described in the report. As stated previously, slums have become a reality in urban areas in Bénin, particularly in Cotonou. According to the United Nations' report, across the board in urban areas around the world, slum neighborhoods "are a concentration of social and economic deprivations, high population density, high numbers of broken families, high unemployment, and economic, physical and social exclusion" (75). As the report suggests, such characteristics "have been recognized as causes of crime and violence and therefore have the potential of a violent time bomb if found in combination in dense urban areas" (75). The OSAC report goes in the same direction in its prediction that the rate of crime in Bénin "is expected to remain at a high level and possibly increase due to high poverty levels and difficult economic conditions." Some criminals are so organized and so intentional in their way of operating that their pattern of living has been termed "oppositional culture," arising from the development of an oppositional identity, which is due to social realities such as unemployment and segregation (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 75). Organized criminality is well present in Bénin not only due to the presence of Béninese

gangs but also because "[o]rganized crime groups from Togo, Nigeria and Burkina Faso involved in the transshipment of stolen cars and drugs are present in Bénin" (OSAC).

Gaga accounts for occurrences of antisocial behaviors in Bénin when he puts them in two categories: assault on others' properties and attacking people (11, 17). The first category, assault on properties, is the most frequent and consist in simple armed robbery, swindling, abuse of trust, forgery, stellionat (selling someone else's goods for personal gain), and misappropriation of funds (11-17). The second category, attacking people, is common as well and mostly consists in voluntary homicide, assault and battery, and some instances of road accidents indicating voluntary assault, drunk driving, or speeding (17-22). Such antisocial behaviors tend to disturb peaceful relatedness between individuals and groups and call for a response that restores individuals into rightful and peaceful relationships with their neighbors.

In spite of this situation, the church has yet to offer a distinctive response or any pertinent action in this regard. If indeed the failure of security forces suggests the state's indirect resignation in the face of crime growth, leaving the population to take "her own security in charge" (Houssou), the church can provide alternative responses to those of the state. To date, Prison Fellowship International (PFI) is the well-known evangelical parachurch prison ministry represented in Bénin under the French name "Fraternité des Prisons Bénin" (FP-B). PFI's vision is "[t]o be a reconciling community of restoration for all those involved in and affected by crime, thereby proclaiming and demonstrating the redemptive power and transforming love of Jesus Christ for all people" ("About Us"). PFI achieves this vision by exhorting and serving "the Body of Christ in prisons and in the community in its ministry to prisoners, ex-prisoners, victims and their families; and in

its advancement of Biblical standards of justice in the criminal justice system" ("PFI Vision and Mission"). They assist prison chaplaincy, organize volunteers from churches to visit prison, conduct worship services and Bible studies behind the bars. In Bénin PFI took the form of evangelism in prison in its first years, but in recent years (since 2003) it began adding social concerns such as health care, vocational training to inmates, and legal counseling (to prisoners and their families). PFI in Bénin also offers assistance to prisoners' families consisting of in-home visitations, angel tree programs, and education of their children ("Actions"). No one can deny the great services that such ministry is doing for some inmates in Bénin. As this research demonstrates, however, FP-B's endeavor in Bénin does not fully express the theology of the Church and consequently may not facilitate justice reconstruction in the land as expressed in this work.

Context of the Study

Porto-Novo and Cotonou are essentially religious pluralist urban centers with Islam, traditional religions, and different strands of Christianity flourishing together (Barbier and Dorier-Apprill 231-36). Christian pluralism in both cities is manifested by the presence of diverse overseas mission-related churches and indigenous Béninese churches and ministries. The last few decades have met with a phenomenal birth of new evangelical churches in urban areas, the majority of which come from the prophetic and Pentecostal movements (223). Nevertheless, the socioeconomic situation is still very low and gives way to criminality. Cotonou and Porto-Novo share similar social characteristics due to their proximity and the easy road connections between both cities.

Cotonou

Cotonou is a southern city in the Republic of Bénin. The name *Cotonou* is a Europeanized version of a Béninese (Fon/Gun) name, *Ku-Tonu*.[3] As such, Ku-Tonu means "the lagoon of death" (Adissoba). This name likely emerged due to the red trees bordering the lagoon that render the lagoon reminiscent of the color of blood. Historically, people believed that the souls of the deceased came down to the river Ouémé (a river near the sea linking Cotonou to other areas of the country) before they went to the sea. The city of Cotonou borders a lake that opens to the Atlantic Ocean (see Appendix A). Although formerly insignificant in the context of the larger country, Cotonou is now the most significant city in the Republic of Bénin. This significance has emerged because Cotonou now holds economic, political, and administrative importance, although Cotonou is not the official capital of the country. The city of Cotonou covers an area of about 19,750 acres from one side of the lagoon to the other. The city lies in the southeast of the country, between the Atlantic Ocean and Nokoué Lake, and is located almost on the equator at 6°22' North, 2°26' East (6.36667, 2.4333). Cotonou is an urban space divided into social and administrative zones and nonsocial zones. According to the 2002 general census, 70 percent of the total area of the city is urbanized. With the 2006 population estimate of 731,137 inhabitants and the 2002 official count was 665,100 inhabitants, the city of Cotonou holds 11 percent of the totality of the inhabitants of Bénin (INSAE 77).

As recent as February 2003, Cotonou was given the political descriptor of "Urban Circumscription of Cotonou" and as such was governed by an administration under the

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[3] *Ku* stands for death and *Tonu* stands for lagoon.

direct supervision of the central government of Bénin. Following the adoption and implementation of the new politic of decentralization in Bénin, Cotonou became one of the twelve departments to replace the former six departments of Bénin. Given its high status in the country, Cotonou alone was given the political descriptor of a department and thus is called "Département du Littoral" ("Election"). Most of the politico-administrative, commercial, financial, and industrial services of the country are located in Cotonou. The house of the president of the Republic is located in Cotonou, as are almost all of the government ministries. The socioeconomic council of Bénin, the high authority of audiovisual and communication, the high court of justice, and the autonomous national electoral council reside in Cotonou. All the foreign embassies represented in Bénin are in Cotonou ("Adresses Utiles").[4]

Unlike today, years ago Cotonou was not an important area in the country. Cotonou progressed from being a rural setting in precolonial times to an urban center of commercial interest in colonial and post-colonial times. France, Bénin's historical colonial country and a contemporary ally, nourished and carried out economic interests in Bénin against the will of most of Bénin's natives; thus, France's action forced Bénin to become a base of European merchants' exchange activities with its natives. Cotonou is a colonial creation and a port city with several intercity connections that enabled regional and international trades and a quick spread of modernity. It continues to dominate the economy of the country and to serve as the economic capital (Dorier-Apprill and Domingo 43-45).

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[4] Bénin has embassies from countries such as Germany, China, Cuba, Egypt, France, the United States, Ghana, Libya, Niger, Nigeria, Russia, and Tchad.

> They are two important turning points of the economy of Benin: the level of paid employment and of investment is higher compared to that of other cities in the country. They assure almost the totality of transit toward other regions of the country and toward other bordering countries. (12)

In his 1992 study on urban growth, migration, and population in Bénin, Gaye K. Julien Guingnido gives special attention to Cotonou and compares it to Porto-Novo and Parakou. Given the strong concentration of urban growth in Cotonou, he talks about "macrocephale urbanization," estimating that international emigration contributes to accentuate demographic imbalances due to the unstopped rural exodus between rural areas and cities (43). He observes that the remarkable growth of Cotonou, resulting from strong rural immigrations into that city, is due to the economic opportunities that Cotonou and Porto-Novo offer. Cotonou is seen as a center for economic growth not only for both southern and central Bénin but also for the whole country. Guingnido discusses the importance of Cotonou and the northern city Parakou.

The city of Porto-Novo provides important historical as well as contemporary links to Cotonou. Years ago, two highways connected the two cities easily. About five years ago, a third highway was built, cofinanced by the government of Germany (84 percent of the cost) and the government of Bénin ("Coopération Bénino-Allemande"). Given that other roads make the connection to Cotonou easy from other sides of the country, "the city of Cotonou draws its population essentially from neighborhood regions and suburbs" (Attanasso 8), with a growth rate of 8.2 percent between 1961 and 1979, 3.89 percent between 1979 and 1992, and 2.07 percent between 1992 and 2002 (8). According to M-O. Attanasso, Cotonou concentrates more than 45 percent of the active population of the ten cities of the country. Given that women are not generally expected

to be involved in criminal behaviors, the high level of female activity in crime (from 37.2 percent in 1979 to 54.7 percent in 1992) is remarkable (8).

Cotonou holds the potential economy of Bénin to the extent that to destroy Cotonou amounts to destroying the largest part of the whole economy of Bénin. Guingnido reasonably points to this reality:

> [T]he political, economical and social environment that has prevailed in the past 30 years in Bénin has been evident in the demographic area through an accelerated growth of the principal cities of the country, particularly the cities of Cotonou and Parakou that have known an annual average growth rate of 8%. This acceleration of the growth of cities took place in the absence of any urban politic, notably in regard to the principal city of Cotonou. (9)

While the growth of other cities is acknowledged in general, Cotonou remains the most important.

The noted lack of urban politics can be historically understandable and has a lot of consequences as far as social problems are concerned. Historically, one can understand that Cotonou became attractive on a utilitarian basis when self-interested imperialistic people exploited the land and the natives. It still carries the same heritage today with a lot of negative consequences of which poverty is the most pronounced.

In his research thesis, Professor B. Akpakpa N'Bessa claims that although the phenomenon of migration from rural areas to the city of Cotonou became important after the proclamation of independence in 1960, it did not create such problems as slums in the city of Cotonou. In his analysis, he found that once those who came to Cotonou looking for jobs become disillusioned, "they are quickly disenchanted, they prefer to go back soon to their region of origin; this creates a sort of balance in the urban population" (68). His conclusion that "Cotonou does not know a serious system of slums as one encounters

in the big African metropolitan areas, such as the slums of Colobane and Fass in Dakar" (68) is seriously at odd with contemporary realities. The phenomenon of slums is well established in Cotonou and constitutes one of the current problems facing the city.

If the analysis of the slum issue cannot be said to be the same today as it was thirty-five years ago, according to N'Bessa's work, the issue of unemployment and underemployment, which are essential backdrops for the advent of slums, remain the same. In the same research he presented, N'Bessa, after remarking that slums were not a big issue in Cotonou adds, "[T]he most difficult problem is that of unemployment and underemployment" (68). A contemporary analysis of the social situation in Cotonou would come to a similar conclusion, with other ramifications as well as Attanasso thinks in her contemporary studies of the social indicators of the city of Cotonou (40-48). Her rapport is a good description of poverty in Cotonou as it discusses the social situation of Cotonou through some principal trajectories such as health/education, environment/sanitation, poverty, inflation, and employment, joblessness and housing.

In a recent collection of studies on urban poverty in Bénin researchers identified four areas most touched by inequality. In the city of Cotonou, one of the cities studied, households of three adults, paid workers, and households of three or four people are the most affected by poverty (Adégbidi et al. 12). The same study reveals that "more than half of the urban population in Bénin is either poor, or vulnerable to poverty. The incidence of alimentary poverty reaches 55 percent" (16). Interestingly enough, the study adds, "These rates are similar in all cities, except Cotonou that knows the highest incidence of poverty (whether global or alimentary)" (16). Attanasso believes, based on some 1999-2000 data that Cotonou alone contributes to a rate of 60 percent of urban

poverty, to 68.7 percent for the depth of urban poverty, and close to 75 percent for the severity of urban poverty in the country (40). The inequality found in Cotonou is justified by the fact that while poverty is so high in the city, in the same city the country has its highest rate of households living in high socioeconomic status (Adégbidi et al. 25).

While unemployment is a generalized phenomenon in Cotonou, its extent is more pronounced in the ninth borough[5] where the rate of unemployment is 14.3 percent. The tenth and eleventh boroughs follow the ninth borough where the employment rates are respectively 7.3 percent and 6 percent. Of the unemployed people in Cotonou, 87 percent are male of which the majority are young males. Some of these unemployed (28.8 percent) have been schooled up to sixth grade, and 35.4 percent have university-level education with an average length of three years of unemployment (Attanasso 46). Most houses in Cotonou are made with strong materials such as cement or concrete. While most houses are electrified (70.4 percent), about half (51.4 percent) of the houses have access to clean water, despite the fact that the national house of electricity and water is located in Cotonou (53). The households without running water have financial limitations and are, therefore, bound to purchase water from their neighbors. A few of them resort to using what can be considered unclean water (usually from the well).[6] About half of the people living in house are owners of their property in the first (57.5 percent), sixth (52.4

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[5] Following the adoption and the implementation of the new politic of decentralization in the country, Cotonou came under the government of an elected mayor who is assisted by a municipal council. As such Cotonou is subdivided into smaller administrative unities called boroughs (arrondissements in French), under the leadership of a chief of borough. The boroughs have no financial or judicial autonomy apart from the larger commune. Each borough is again subdivided into smaller entities called city squatters, which constitute the smallest units of the city ("Election").

[6] Indeed, whereas water from the well in many rural areas can be said to be cleaner, that of Cotonou is far from being clean given the fact that Cotonou is surrounded by the unclean lake, rivers, and sea.

percent), and seventh (51.7 percent) boroughs whereas rented houses are concentrated in the fourth and thirteenth boroughs (53). A nightmare for some houses in Cotonou is flooding, which occurs periodically during every rainy season. This phenomenon is acute in the second borough where all houses can be found under water in the rainy period. Most of the houses in the first and fifth boroughs are less invaded by water while those in the seventh, ninth, and thirteenth boroughs have no problem with inundation (59). Not only is housing confronted with the problems of inundation, many Cotonou dwellers cannot afford rental houses to live. Because they do not go home anymore, as N'Bessa suggests, the phenomenon of slums has become a reality in Bénin. Five areas are known to be specifically slum areas in Cotonou (Racine) in addition to those where slums are, for the time being, at a minor stage. These five areas are Placodji, Enangnon (formerly called Akpakpadodomè), Hlacomè, Agbato, and Agbodjèdo. The first two places are situated in the south of Cotonou, bordering the Atlantic Ocean and the lake of Cotonou, and are spread around the oldest bridge of Cotonou (see Appendix C). This area is made of more than forty thousand inhabitants. The last three places, of more than 150 thousand, are in the north of Cotonou, bordering the lake of Cotonou. This area is believed to be the most difficult to live in at all times and particularly in the rainy seasons. The Web site of the NGO[7] called *Racine* describes these places more pointedly:

> These five squatters, among the poorest of Cotonou, are characterized by notable socioeconomic difficulties: absence of alternatives to improve incomes, precarious health situation, weak capacity for the establishment of schools and massive academic failures, absence of communal actions for area sanitation, etc. ("Zone d'Intervention")

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[7]NGO is a French acronym that stands for non governmental organizations (Organisations Non Gouvernementales) and corresponds to what is called nonprofit organizations in the U. S.

These characteristics effectively reflect the state of these areas, all which are conducive to the performance and the growth of antisocial behaviors.

Life in Cotonou is also characterized by serious dysfunction in families, most of which were unheard of in traditional Béninese families. Common experiences now include households with couples living together, married couples living in different homes, increasing number of divorced women (with and without children), and children not knowing and not living with their parents (Agoli-Agbo 6). These factors, in addition to lack of social support after the death of parents, cause the dire difficulties children face such as the phenomenon of street children known as a precursor of delinquency.

Porto-Novo

Like Cotonou, Porto-Novo is also a southeastern city of Bénin (see Appendix A). Porto-Novo is the capital with great historical significance. Located about eighteen miles from the Atlantic Ocean and about forty miles from Cotonou, Porto-Novo has about 230,000 inhabitants. Historically, two indigenous people groups, called the *Gun* and *Yoruba*, populated the city. The Gun calls Porto-Novo *Hogbonou* (the entrance of a big house) and the Yoruba calls the city *Adjatchè* (a place conquered by the Adja). The Porto-Novo community was founded in the late sixteenth century as the capital of a small African state. In the seventeenth century, the Portuguese built a trading post there, and the settlement subsequently became a center for sending black Africans to the Americas as slaves. In the late nineteenth century, the area came under the control of the French colonial rulers and was made the capital of the French Dahomey in 1900. Porto-Novo has served as the administrative capital of the new country since its renaming in 1975. The name *Porto-Novo* is of Portuguese origin. The Portuguese believed that the city

resembled the Portuguese city Puerto, after their arrival in the sixteenth century to participate in the slave trade; thus the city was christened *Puerto-Nuevo* or *New Puerto*, in reference to the Portuguese city Puerto.

The city flourished due to the slave trade with the Portugese, after which it came under French colonial control. Porto-Novo is easily connected to Cotonou, Bénin major industrial area (see Appendix D). Important buildings in the city include Bénin's national archives, some government buildings, the Ethnography Museum, the Institute of Applied Research, various African art guilds, an ancient Roman Catholic cathedral, and the Palace of Dahomey's historic king Toffa.

The socioeconomic problems in Porto-Novo are similar to those found in Cotonou because both cities are closely connected to one another historically and geographically (Dorier-Apprill and Domingo 4). The issue of poverty is thus a reality for both cities and is manifested, among others, by the rise and growth of antisocial behaviors. El Hadji Mor Ndiouga Diop recognizes that the escalating return of criminality in Cotonou is caused by multiples factors such as uncontrolled immigration, chronic poverty, and the undisciplined extension of the city causing geographically isolated areas to develop organized criminal groups. The underlying cause of the issue, Diop argues, is poverty:

> [P]overty is usually the mother of all vices that gangrenes African societies. Difficulties to satisfy primary needs, the desire to succeed no-matter-what in a society where the poor are left to themselves, and finally being considered simply as another person entirely lead certain persons to choose the easy route to get money. The repercussions of these deficiencies are obvious: escalation of nightly break ins, frequent rapes and aggressions, proliferation of armed bands.

This acknowledgement of the role of poverty in the rise and continuation of the phenomenon of antisocial behaviors is an important element in the analysis of the

situation. The state-approved response to these fruits of poverty leads to discussing prison culture as another aspect of the context that justifies the necessity of reconstruction in Cotonou and Porto-Novo.

Prisoners' Lives in Cotonou

A report of professor E. V. O. Dankwa's recent visit to Cotonou prisons and detention centers shows no sign of an urban evangelical church's involvement in the plight of antisocial behaviors. The report mentions a meeting with NGOs and media personnel that was also attended by U.S.-based Prison Fellowship delegates (54). The reporter describes the obvious unfortunate circumstances of Benin's prisoners: "Remand was too long with some stretching to 12 years. Old male prisoners, too weak to cause harm to anyone await death in their cells. There were prisoners who were seriously ill but had no medical care" (22). At another detention center Dankwa made this observation:

> The clothes of the inmates were taken from them before detention. These have been dumped in a car which was not protected from rain. The Africans in custody were aggrieved that two Europeans were allowed to put their clothes on. The explanation of the officer that the two would soon be released did not sound convincing enough reason to treat the Africans differently. (25)

A treatment such as the one described above is difficult to explain, particularly when it happens in an African territory.

Professor Dankwa discovered that the civil prison of Cotonou, originally built for four hundred prisoners, now houses 1,462 prisoners, including fifty-five women, 969 remands, 453 convicts, and twenty-two prison guards (26). One female prisoner complained, "I have been in prison for 5 years. I just go to court time after time to sign papers without being tried" (27). Another female said, "The police were looking for my boyfriend, and when they could not find him, they arrested me" (27). Dankwa rightly

responded to these statements, saying, "While the truth of their allegations could not be confirmed, early trial will solve the problem" (27). Other prisoners in Cotonou described their situation in these terms:

> We are dumped here for years without being tried, and even when we are taken to court, we are just told to sign [papers] and then brought back to prison. If you do not have money, you will not be released. If you have money you will be granted bail. (28)

Stating that justice can be obfuscated with money is an acceptable description, and for this reason it ceases to be justice, particularly for the poor. In spite of the strong recommendations pertaining to improving the life conditions of prisoners and detainees made by this 1999 report, things had not changed by 2004.

In effect, in February 2004, an inquiry team of International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) rendered a report of their observation of justice in Bénin. Concentrating on Cotonou and Porto-Novo cases, the team inquired regarding how justice administration, human rights, due process, human treatment, and discrimination operate in Bénin (Fédération Internationale 5). Based on sobering data gathered during visits to prisoners, detainees, and authorities in charge of the prisons, the FIDH team accounts for torturous, cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment suffered by those who have been caught by the Bénin justice system (10). Some of the findings included

√ Unlimited provisory detention (a detainee they met in a room called B5 has been maintained in detention since 5 June 1996),

√ Absence of hygiene (prisoners and detainees are kept in dirty conditions within narrow compounds with obvious fowl odors),

√ Lack of sleeping space (one to two hundred detainees are packed into an eight by ten meter room),

√ Little to no access to health care (many prisoners including minors suffer from serious body swelling and other undeclared health problems),

√ Insufficient food (as a rule prisoners and detainees have one meal per day, which generally includes no meat, fish, or fruit),

√ No access to legal counseling (particularly minor persons have no assistance in this regard),

√ Regular extended isolation inflicted on prisoners, which can last up to two months, and

√ Payment of a monthly apartment fee given to penitentiary authorities (Federation International 17).

Several of these mistreatments take place in Bénin in violation of international and national laws against human mistreatment.[8] The overcrowding accounted for by the 1999 report worsened in 2004. As such the prison of Cotonou, initially built for a capacity of four hundred persons, had 1,686 detainees (17-18). Whether evangelical churches in Cotonou understand the extent of the situation and are not moved by it is unclear.

Prisoners' Lives in Porto-Novo

The civil prison of Porto-Novo, Dankwa discovered, is in a state of overcrowdness. Initially built for three hundred prisoners, the civil prison housed, in 1999, 603 prisoners including 565 men, fifteen women (some of whom had three young children), and thirteen juveniles including young girls (Dankwa 12). Further, Dankwa found that female prisoners like all others had insufficient food and poor health care.

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[8] The FIDH 2004 report references each law that is violated upon every mistreatment the report mentions.

Some inmates reported no visitors and lack of food. Dankwa makes the following statement regarding the treatment of juveniles in the Porto-Novo civil prison: "One of them complained of being given a medicine which had expired while another complained that he had not received the drug which had been prescribed for him. The food was described as bad" (14). Other complaints were related to corruption in the judiciary and injustice in the penal system. Further, the food they were able to get was insufficient and of poor quality. No one in the prisons attended to the health needs of the prisoners, and the prison had no medicine. Prisoners might receive a prescription, but they would have no means to buy the medicine. Dankwa quoted one source saying, "One boy died two weeks ago because he did not have money to buy medicine when he was sick. He was sick for three months without medical attention" (14). Another inmate he met with said, "Government does not provide jobs, so young people fall into criminality" (15). Still another inmate said, "If you come from a poor family, there is no hope for you" (15). The justice context within which urban evangelical churches are living in Bénin demands an alternative response.

The overcrowded condition of prisons in Cotonou and Porto-Novo, and in the whole nation for that matter, has become a serious preoccupation to the point that the country's authorities recently finished building another prison in a town nearby Porto-Novo called Akpro-Missérété. According to J. A, several prisoners are led from the prison of Porto-Novo and other correctional centers to the new prison at the satisfaction of many among the population.

Christian Presence in Bénin

Citing the number of Christian denominations existing in Cotonou is a difficult task (Alokpo 51-52, 170-232). In addition to innumerable Christian denominations, several interdenominational associations also exist in Bénin. The oldest and most important association is the Council of Protestant and Evangelical Churches (CEPEB; Alokpo 195-247). The CEPEB resulted from the marginalization of Methodists from the former Methodist-dominated interdenominational grouping called Conseil Interconfesionnel Protestant du Bénin (Protestant Interconfessional Council of Bénin, CIPB). As of 2007, CEPEB represents more than thirty evangelical and Pentecostal denominations (Mayrargue 13). This council now owns the only evangelical radio station, Radio Maranatha, currently in existence in Bénin.[9] The second important interdenominational association, the Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions of Bénin (FEMEB), broke away from CEPEB for reasons of doctrinal purity at the time when Methodist leadership was still strongly felt (Alokpo 171-94). FEMEB began in 1991 with the Assemblies of God and some Baptist churches and now consists of about fifteen evangelical denominations and missions. The third organization is the Association of Evangelical Missions, Ministries, and Churches of Bénin (AMMEEB, Alokpo 233-47). With more than fifty denominations, AMMEEB consists of Bénin-initiated denominations with typical evangelical and Pentecostal characteristics.

The current important place that Bénin evangelical churches hold is due to their flourishing in the early 1990s after the authoritarian regime's decay of late 80s, which

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[9] The U. S.-based Trans World Radio was recently granted authorization by country officials and so was due to start operating in April 2007.

paved the way to the establishment of the democratic process in Bénin. While all other major religious movements, including Islam and Vodoun, increased their influence in that period, evangelical and Pentecostal churches "have been more affected by the religious revival" due to "the way in which [some of them] have succeeded in changing their indifferent attitude towards politics and developed strategies which enabled them not only to politically emerge but also to play important political roles during the transitional period and throughout the 90's" (Mayrargue 4). In addition, former President Kérékou, a former Roman Catholic turned Marxist atheist who converted to Islam, gave a boost to the evangelical population from the 1996 presidential election period when he claimed to have become a born again believer (11). President Kérékou's confession in the context of religious freedom brought about by the democratic process and the traditional Roman Catholic presence only in the public sphere stimulated the evangelical movement's interest in politics. After the 1996 failed conference aiming at getting a consensus on evangelicals in politics, the CEPEB succeeded in 1997 in getting that consensus; thus, evangelicals "appeared more determined and convinced by the prophetic role that the church should play in politics by leading the nation according to the will of God" (14). One of the strategies adopted was to encourage president Kérékou to appoint evangelical Christians in high government positions that allowed for the large presence of evangelicals in public affairs and continues to do so. The latest presidential election ended with the arrival of President Yayi Thomas Boni who, beside his high qualifications as a bank officer, makes no apology about his faith as an evangelical believer and is also working on placing evangelicals in important high government positions.[10]

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[10] Some of the people President Boni selected come as familiar evangelical believers. His first

The overall landscape of Christianity in Bénin is that of Christian pluralism. Jean-Claude Barbier and Elizabeth Dorier-Apprill use national census and evangelical research data to show a picture of Christian pluralism in Bénin (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1. Christian Pluralism in Bénin

Distribution of Christians According to General (Census) Sources in Bénin					Worship Place According to ARCEB Research	
	1992 Census (Household Declarations)		ARCEB (Counting Church Members per Church)		Church Plants	Church Members per Place
	n	%	N	%	n	n
Roman Catholic Churches	1,270,000	73.0	342,373	34.2	1,410	242.8
Methodist	174,418	10.0	75,888	7.6	502	151.2
Total	**295,246**	**17.0**	**581.511**	**58.2**		

Source: Barbier and Dorier-Apprill 3.

As Table 1.1 shows, evangelicals are differentiated from Roman Catholics, Methodists, and some clearly identified indigenous groups such as the Cherubin and Seraphin churches and the Celestial Church of Christ. Furthermore, conservative,

Director of Cabinet, Magistrate Nestor Dako, is, like President Boni, from the Assemblies of God church, and is also former national president of Bénin's Youth for Christ movement. Mr. Dako later became Minister of Justice. Other evangelical figures include former Minister of Budget Albert Houngbo, an evangelical Methodist, and Mr. Armand Zinzindohoué, former minister reporting to the President and current minister of transportation and public works, from the Assemblies of God church, the former Bénin's Youth for Christ president, who for many years has held the presidency of the association called *Les Amis de la Radio Maranatha*, the main association supporting Bénin's evangelical radio.

charismatic, and Pentecostal bodies are included under the descriptor *evangelical* because these groups self-identify with evangelicals, agreeing such distinctions as important.

Bénin churches that self-identify historically with Protestant qualification can now be seen as non-evangelical, which is why the Assemblies of God denomination changed its name from Eglise Protestante des Assemblées de Dieu to Eglise Evangélique des Assemblées de Dieu (Alokpo 23). One explanation for this shift emerges upon consideration of the Protestant Methodist Church of Bénin, the country's most Protestant denomination. It has become lukewarm in regard to its historical evangelical way of life and thus "lost her monopoly in the presence of the contribution of other Protestant wings of European and American origins" (Barbier and Dorier-Apprill 3). The majority of evangelical churches in Bénin have links with Western, Nigerian, and Ghanaian evangelical denominations and churches of revival. While other churches have indigenous roots or beginnings, generally they have some relationships with Western, particularly American, evangelicalism through training of ministers and long distance video or cassette-based teaching/preaching of popular evangelists such as Pat Roberson, T. L. Osborn, and Reinhard Bonkee. Therefore, the popular evangelical tenets of Christian faith in the Western world are also shared by urban evangelical churches in Bénin.

Urban Evangelical Congregations in Bénin.

For the purpose of this study the qualifier *urban* refers to the location of participating churches of this study. As Edgar J. Elliston and J. Timothy Kauffman say, "*[U]rban* [original emphasis] refers to a geographical area characterized by a high population density and multiplicity of interconnected social system such as

transportation, food, communication, education, energy production and distribution, commerce, law enforcement, and other" (4). Specifically, the churches on which this study is based are located in two of the major cities of Bénin that fulfill the above characteristic, namely Cotonou and Porto-Novo. These two cities are part of what E. Dorier-Apprill and E. Domingo call "urban Béninese littoral region" in which 60 percent of Bénin urban population reside (2).

An accurate meaning of *evangelical church* in the context of Bénin is difficult to determine. Evangelicals in Bénin include (1) recent Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches of Anglo-Saxon origin, (2) older evangelical congregations, (3) tiny and larger independent/indigenous congregations, most of which are founded by and made up of Béninese who formerly belonged to more historical churches, Catholic and Methodist (Claffey 144). For the purpose of this paper, I define the term as all the Christian churches in Bénin that self-define as evangelical through doctrinal statements or in presentation to the public. Perhaps the most important sign of this self-definition is found in the churches' names. As such, most evangelical churches in Bénin bear the qualifier evangelical in their name. Nevertheless, other evangelical churches refer to themselves as *Biblical*, *of God*, *of the Gospel*, *of the Holy Spirit*, or they use other descriptive words drawn from the Bible.

Another way people define an evangelical church in Bénin is by identifying traits of non-evangelical churches; thus, evangelical congregations in Benin are usually distinguished from Roman Catholic, Methodist, and certain types of African (Béninese) indigenous congregations.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe current responses of evangelical congregations in Porto-Novo and Cotonou toward antisocial behaviors in the context of Bénin's failing criminal justice system. Behind this purpose was the desire to formulate an alternative vision and practice for Christian communities in Cotonou and Porto-Novo as an appropriate response to antisocial behaviors. This study then anticipates a comprehensive ecclesiastical model that can be used by urban evangelical churches in response to the escalating phenomenon of antisocial behaviors in Bénin. This survey identified evangelical churches located in the areas of Cotonou and Porto-Novo where criminal acts are most frequent. The survey also describes these churches' level of awareness regarding the rise of antisocial behaviors and these churches' level of responses to such behaviors. Findings were interpreted through the lenses of African reconstruction theology with a restorative justice approach in order to suggest a way forward for evangelical churches in Bénin.

Research Questions

This study identified four research questions:

1. What level of awareness of antisocial behaviors currently describes evangelical congregations in Cotonou and Porto-Novo?

2. What characteristics describe the involvement of the evangelical churches' Christian ministry in Porto-Novo and Cotonou in their response to criminality and the public crisis of antisocial behaviors?

3. How do evangelical congregations in Cotonou and Porto-Novo evaluate the work being done by the Béninese criminal justice system?

4. In what ways do church members envision becoming more active in responding to the phenomenon of antisocial behaviors in their respective neighborhoods?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the principal terms carried the following meaning.

Urban Evangelical Churches

According to this study, urban evangelical congregations are those churches that self-define as evangelicals based conventional evangelical doctrines and who are located within the urban setting

Antisocial Behaviors

This study defines antisocial behaviors as those who, whether performed in low or high intensity, bring about the existence of two opposing parties, namely victims and offenders.

Justice

Because "[t]he acts of the one who oppresses are as serious as those of the one who assaults or robs" (Zehr, *Changing Lenses* 137) and are contrary to God's shalom, this study defines justice in a holistic way, blending social justice and criminal justice as a whole.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative research as discussed by William Wiersma and Stephen G. Jurs (155-222). The qualitative approach of this work is intended to communicate the holistic and flexible ways in which data is approached. It also assigns a high importance to the views of those being studied and puts the researcher in a position

of revising and correcting prior assumptions and conclusions as the research proceeds (201-02). The goal was to describe current responses of churches toward antisocial behaviors in the context of Béninese failing criminal justice system. The study made use of researcher-designed, structured, and open-ended interview instruments with questionnaires based on the research goals.

This research was conducted involving in total eight focus groups. A total of four to six individual participants was expected from each group. Each group is made of one leader/pastor who led the process of recruiting volunteer members from his congregation. The study was based on a telephone focus group interview strategy. A research assistant was hired in order to facilitate contacts with pastors and their congregations. At first, the research assistant presented a letter to the pastor with the purpose of introducing the research and exploring the pastor's/leader's interest in the research (see Appendix F). Only when the leader of the congregation expresses an interest was the research carried out with his congregation. When a congregation leader is open to the research, the research assistant proceeded with further discussion as to how volunteer selections is to be carried and the processes to take place before the telephone interview. The pastor was to make one or two announcements inviting volunteers to participate. Once volunteers are selected, the research assistant or the pastor distribute to the background and demographic questionnaire to be filled out (see Appendix G). Those questionnaires were to be turned in to me before telephone interview time. Once the research assistant received the completed questionnaires, he then proceeded to make appointments for the telephone interviews, and I complied with the times agreed upon by all focus group members. In preparation to the telephone interview, the research assistant distributed the

focus group basic questions for discussion and the group discussion ground rules sheet to all participants.

Participants

For the purpose of this dissertation I employed a purposeful delimitation of its participants (Wiersma and Jurs 203) by selecting local congregations from diverse geographical and denominational backgrounds within Cotonou and Porto-Novo. Selection was based on each evangelical local congregation's willingness to participate in this research. Data were collected through the method of semi-structure interview protocol engaging focus groups through telephone. Each group was made up of urban church leaders and selected key church members. Accordingly, research participants in this study were leaders and members of urban evangelical churches situated within Cotonou and Porto-Novo. I selected participants according to their abilities to make reliable judgments regarding their churches' relationships to the issues raised by this research. This research involved eight evangelical congregations in both Cotonou and Porto-Novo. Participants in this research were selected based their willingness to participate, on their being an active member of the targeted church, and on their relative prior experience with antisocial behaviors.

Delimitation and Generalizability

This study was focused on collecting data from selected evangelical churches in Cotonou and Porto-Novo; however, results may be generalized to any urban church in Bénin that self-identifies as evangelical and do not rely on a specific evangelical denomination. The choice of those churches was determined by their geographical situation *vis-à-vis* places known to most people as zones of criminal activities. This

selection limits generalizability because other churches, including some evangelical churches, may not be concerned with the findings contained in this research. Inasmuch as an evangelical church or ministry can self-identify with the descriptions of the churches represented, this study and its findings may be helpful.

The outcome of the findings, that is, the description of urban evangelical congregations in relation to antisocial behaviors, was limited by the desire of having a wide denominational and geographical representation in each city. The selection was subjective and may not reflect some urban evangelical churches' key points, particularly those I was obliged to leave out. Though widely accepted key points define all evangelicals in Bénin so that the *evangelical* is used in common, certain points mark significant differences among them. The description made of evangelicals in this study must be submitted to verification before being applied to all evangelicals as exceptions must be allowed.

For the purpose of this work, the data collected was limited to a restricted number of self-avowed evangelicals located within Cotonou and Porto-Novo where noted regular antisocial behavioral incidences occur. In turn the data was analyzed to construct some preliminary conclusions on what is necessary for those congregations, in terms of both identity reshaping and actions, to respond differently to the issue at stake.

Given the plethora of evangelical churches in both cities, the restricted number selected is a limiting factor for generalization. However, to the extent that the description of urban evangelical churches in Cotonou and Porto-Novo resembles other churches' identity within those cities and in other cities of Bénin or of the West African region, some broader assumptions may be made. A similar use of the instrument designed for the

purpose of this study on other evangelical churches will help describe their responses to antisocial behaviors and suggests pathways to respond accordingly.

Theological Grounding

The theological basis of this work stems from a way of viewing the underlying issue at stake that is causing antisocial behaviors. Underlying the issue is a public moral crisis, which is causing many people to suffer from poverty and a lack of basic necessities of life.

The widely held belief is that morality is a system of principles and judgments based on cultural, religious, and philosophical concepts and beliefs, by which humans determine whether given actions are right or wrong. Nigerian professor Y. A. Objaje suggests that although the word *morality* is a pregnant term, it can be considered as meaning "ways of regulating the conduct of individual in communities" (22). This regulation is important because "human conduct must be guided in order to avoid chaos in society" (22). Thus, the field of morality is that which is concerned with good and bad or right and wrong human behaviors. For the sake of keeping its focus, this research does not engage in the philosophical debate of whether right and wrong exist. This study simply assumes that right and wrong do exist for the sake of communal health, based on the cultural milieu of ministry and on the understanding of Christianity as it emerged from the first century context and onwards.

Like most countries in the world, Bénin is faced with a terrible problem of immorality in its populace. In effect, there is a general lack of sensitivity for right and wrong behaviors. Most people are preoccupied with high social ranks and high degrees that inspire respect and consideration from other people. All these privileges are sought

without any consideration for traditional ways of living for common good. General Mathieu Kérékou, the former president of the country, in his last *Message à la Nation* on the eve of Independence Day, expresses this concern very well:

> The value of a citizen does not reside solely in his profile of competence, his training, his professional qualification, in the respect and consideration that his social statute and political rank inspire. It certainly resides in those qualities, but much more in the observance by the citizen, in his daily social practice, of principles and ethical rules pertaining to the management of public things, to the respect of common good, to the primacy of global interest, to self-sacrifice so that the whole nation might live, grow and prosper. (Houngbédji, "Discours")

With this definition of a good citizen, he notes, "[T]he ill from which our society is cruelly suffering is deeply moral, the lack of faith having dried up the hearts of most of our compatriots." His remarks are true because like other countries, Bénin also shares in general moral decadence. Mary G. Nwagwu describes the issue as follows:

> [West Africa moral decadence is characterized by] bribery and corruption, tribal and religious violence and bigotry, cultism, embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds, dishonesty and non accountability in Government offices, the greasing of hand of authorities before obtaining employment, or admission, or promotion or award of contracts, examination and election malpractices. (60)

A similar observation is valuable about Bénin in particular as expressed by a careful political observer during the last presidential campaign. "If there is crisis in Benin, it is more moral than economic" ("La Résolution"). Indeed, the sad reality is that in many respects, "it is the moral crisis that has caused [and is causing] an economic crisis characterized by the unending growth of impoverishment" ("La Résolution") of the people, while the wealthy are getting wealthier. In such a context, although evangelical churches have become active in the current political sphere, since the time of the born

again former President Mathieu Kérékou, the influence of Christian ways of life in the public sphere remains little. C. Mayrargue's analysis to this effect is to the point:

> The policies carried out by [president Kérékou's] successive governments are not however seeming to be affected by his newly adopted faith. This is because, religion is just a resource and not a stake in the Beninese politics. There have never been for instance public debates on the place or role of religions in the country nor the manifestation of will of questioning the secularism of the State or adjusting the constitution by taking in account religious factor. (11)

In a context where Christian faith appears to be not a stake but a resource, the necessity for rediscovering a new sense of being church in society in such a way that the underlying draws a response is in order. To that end, this work argues that the church must be publicly prophetic (restraining social ills in words and actions) and pastoral (caring for the victims of social ills) in its society.

This study then rested on a theology of the church as mission, ministry, and as a company of Christocratic fellowship, the purpose of which is to engage the whole people of God to participate in God's continuing task of reconstructing his creation in the present day. This vision of church was discussed long ago by the late lay theologian Hendrik Kraemer when he rejected an ecclesiology that keeps the majority of church members inactive while making a select few ministers or priests (72). Against such a background, Kraemer rightfully claims that a theology of the laity is not only possible but urgent and must be envisaged not as an appendix to existing clergy-centered ecclesiologies. Rather, it must be an integral part of a total ecclesiology that calls for a vision of the church as an ever-renewed adventure. Such a theology must not be one that makes the laity fit within the system but one that communicates "a new grasp of and commitment to the meaning of God's redemptive purpose with [humankind] and with the world in the past, the

present, and the future" (91). To that end, such a theology, done by mutual cooperation between the laity and professional theologians, must be communicable to the ordinary members who need theological direction to live and witness in a dying and self-destructive world. Kraemer stresses the importance of church members in the task of encountering such a world:

> [I]t is the laity, living and working in the world, which daily experiences the deep gulf between what the Church stands for and what the world drives. They are molded, mangled, confused or suffocated by the dominant trends of thought. Many are bewildered; also many develop a schizophrenic type of mind, harbouring two incompatibles in their thinking, delegating the Christian Faith and what the it is about to an innocuous Sunday-department of life, and losing the acute sensitivity of what the Christian Faith and Church are really about. (114)

Herein lies a noble vision of laity a force infusing the whole and not just an agglomeration of men and women satisfying themselves with words heard from the pulpits on Sundays. Focusing particularly on the special role of the church in the treatment of people with difficult personalities, Frank Lake discusses the great importance of the laity in the task of befriending and facilitating the healing of difficult persons (1043-46). For Lake, a pastor's high regard for professional counseling to interpret the difficult person's issues to him or her is no justification for relying on professional counseling alone:

> As things are in the Church today, it is too easy to forget that the Holy Spirit's intention is to use the whole Church as His therapeutic instrument. The clergyman [or woman] who thinks of himself [or herself] as the be-all and end-all of pastoral care will be driven to the spiritual realities of the situation by the exigencies of the case, when he encounters the [difficult] personality. (1045-46)

The previous remark points to the importance for the church to produce competent laity or competent Christians for the society. For this reason this particular study, because it

grapples with the issue of criminality, stresses the Lukan understanding of Christ as a full, true human at birth, who became a jail bird at death (Soering 2) and whose ministry is to call forth his followers to be like him in the public sphere with the possibility of suffering the same fate as his because of their subversive engagement with society. Thus, *all* [emphasis mine] the members of the church are sealed with the same sacred calling, responsibility, and dignity, "to have their part in the apostolic and ministerial nature and calling of the church" (Kraemer 160). Lake posits the following reflection as crucial in the church's attempt to liberate the laity for ministries that facilitate the healing of difficult persons in society:

> A great spiritual joy awaits the parson and his people when the Biblical concepts of klèros and laos are regained.... The Biblical concept of the klèros includes the whole body of men and women who share in God's gift of redemption and glory, which is their "klèros" or "inheritance." There is therefore no spiritual difference between the klèros and the laos, who are the chosen people of God, belonging to the new community of Christ, without distinction or difference.... [Should the pastor] take upon himself the true pastoral task of a cure of souls, he will find that the Holy Spirit requires of him that humility which looks to the whole community of Christ for the help his sick parishioners need. (1046)

Embracing this vision of church ministry in Bénin in the context of public disintegration due to criminality is very crucial. Such a church will be sensitive to Bénin sociopolitical problems exemplified by antisocial behaviors and respond to these in harmony with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Current views of ecclesiology no longer see the church's task in society as optional or as secondary to the special blessing of individuals' salvation. Rather, contrary to the traditional spiritual and sociopolitical dichotomy, the church's *raison d'être* is now viewed in an integrated way. This way of understanding church hardly accords any value to the now popular narrow view of church or of salvation. In his discussion of the origin

of African theologizing, West African theologian Kwesi Dickson helpfully suggests that given the undoubted growth of the church in Africa, certain important issues need African church leaders' attention (40). One of them is the fact that Africans who profess the new faith limit Christ to prescribed areas of life, leading many to put Christ aside and resort to traditional practices in significant matters. Given the current negative results of these practices, Dickson suggests the necessity for reorienting the Church:

> [There is need of a] drastic re-thinking of all that the Church stands for with a view to creating a more appropriate Christian movement, one that would serve more directly and more effectively the spiritual aspirations of those in Africa who call upon the name of Christ. (40-41)

Such a drastic rethinking has led to several theological approaches in Africa. J. S. Ukpong presents the three major categories of such theological responses encountered in Africa (i.e., African inculturation theology, South African black theology, and African liberation theology; 501-36). Ukpong details the cultural factor, the historical factor, the sociopolitical factor, the contribution of social sciences, and the theological factor that favored these theologies. The liberation emphasis on early African theologizing sounds like a reactionary approach to Western theological hegemony. In order to get past reactionary paradigms, namely liberation and inculturation by the close of the twentieth century, other paradigms became important. Among them are reconstruction theology, which advocates a paradigm shift from liberation to social transformation and reconstruction, and Pentecostal-charismatic and African-initiated theologies, which put emphasis on spiritual liberation (Martey 2-3).

The biblical theological thrust of this research was an African-integrated reconstruction approach to theologizing; thus, this approach opposes the incomplete view that splits the spiritual liberation from sociocultural and political reconstruction, as found

in most Pentecostal-charismatic and African initiated churches' theologies and practices. The reconstruction approach blends all these views together with the centrality on the involvement of Christ's Spirit in each of the spiritual, sociocultural, and political reconstructions aspects. Already at the onset of the development of the metaphor of reconstruction, its pioneer, the East African theologian Jesse N. K. Mugambi, suggests the paradigm as a theological axiom that shifts emphasis from the early liberation approach to the newfound reconstruction approach. Ka Mana, a Zaire-born French-speaking theologian, is also an advocate of reconstruction approach to African Christianity (*Christians and Churches* 90-108). Bénin theologian Valentin Dèdji differentiates the reconstruction perspective in Mugambi and Mana from the liberation paradigm as typified by Jean-Marc Ela and Kwame Bediako, thus pointing to the potential weakness of non-reconstructive liberation discourses (45-250). Initially Mugambi envisioned the reconstructive approach a theological approach covering all areas of societal life: personal, ecclesial, and cultural (including politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics, and religion; *From Liberation* 16-17). While this early view of his reflects a well-integrated approach, the current practice of distinguishing theological perspectives in a way that makes reconstruction theology look as if it is only concerned with sociopolitical works calls for the necessity of emphasizing or using the language of integrated reconstruction.

In agreement with the reconstruction perspective, Valentin Dèdji is helpful in his conviction that "the crucial issue in Africa today is that of Gospel and justice rather than Gospel and culture" (6). With a "justice-conscious culture," he argues, "we will be able to transcend the atrocities of the past, to cope with the powers that be, and move into the

future as transformed creatures" (6). Only in doing that will the Church be able "to foster or to craft habits of responsibility, accountability, and reconciliation in which victimizers and victims alike can have their personality healed, their dignity restored, and their humanity created anew" (6). This reconstruction will be possible only if African church and sociopolitical leaders allow Africans themselves to move *from being objects* that are acted upon *to subjects* of their religious life (9). Reconstruction thus invites a reversal of the long-held position adopted in society.

Given the current facets of urban life in Cotonou, the concept of reconstructive justice is appealing because it focuses on repairing what is wrong in relationship. While several models of justice are available, reconstructive justice derives from insights on justice found in Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments. Patrick T. McCormick discusses the notion from the perspective of Old Testament:

> Throughout the Old Testament justice is seen as a covenantal virtue calling the Hebrews to imitate God's liberating and merciful justice by being faithful in their relationships to Yahweh and their neighbor, by exercising responsible stewardship of the shared inheritance of the land, and in particular by showing concern for those "little ones" in the margins. (13)

Indeed Old Testament practices such as gleaning, almsgiving and the economic readjustment of the sabbatical and jubilee years express covenantal justice that assures the poor were not disenfranchised and that the Hebrew community was thus righteous in God's eyes.

That similar heritage is carried through the New Testament where Jesus liberates those in the margins, stands in firm solidarity with the poor and victimized of all kinds, and confronts economic, political, and religious structures oppressing and alienating

those created in God's image (McCormick 14). Laura Magnani and Harmon L. Wray contrast Jesus' style of justice with that of the state:

> Jesus preached a radical justice, a justice that comes from below and is determined by the people. This was not a justice of reform that would be determined by the state. Reform justice leaves structures and institutions intact. Radical justice redistributes resources among the people and creates space for the people both to define the changes that are required and to demand that they be implemented. (12)

Jesus delivered justice until death in a way that inculcates to his followers that such manner of working with God is normative for living in this world. The same spirit of justice is needed in the sphere of response to antisocial behaviors. Reconstructive justice denies that the current practice of criminal justice can be helpful in any attempt toward plausible solution. It views criminal justice punishment in the same way as it views the pain inflicted by the antisocial person: they both inflict deliberate pain and suffering upon human beings and put them in situations that incapacitate and rob them from their identity as God's image. As Christian social activist Lee Griffith says, "Any ideology that demands the intentional increase in suffering rather than its diminution can hardly lay claim to justice" (97). For this reason an alternative justice system that operates on the assumption that offenders and victims can come back together in covenanted commitment, that offenders can repent, show remorse, and move toward healing themselves and their broken relationships, and that victims can be healed no matter the depth of the offense, is worth pursuing. This sort of emphasis is not new, as it constituted the sum of early legal systems, which form the foundation of Western law. In those systems, Daniel W. Van Ness argues, "[T]he need for offenders and their families to settle with victims and their families" was emphasized and was based on a view that the offense was "a violation against the victim and the victim's family" (64). Such an

interpersonal vision of crime underscores the reality that "a relationship existed between victims and offenders, and that this relationship needed to be addressed in responding to the wrong" (66). The sort of justice delivered as a consequence of the aforementioned departs from the current modern notion of justice, which focuses mainly on due process of law for a fair prosecution to take place. When viewed from a biblical standpoint, the criminal justice notion of fairness comes under judgment:

> Justice is far more than fair treatment and due process. It is also more than vindication of those who have been wronged and punishment of the wrongdoer. The full meaning of justice is to establish once again the shalom that existed before the offense. Justice is active and relational and it is redemptive in its intent. (121)

This kind of approach is best actualized through the practice of restorative justice as an alternative or as a distinctive complement to punishment-driven criminal justice.

Restorative justice fits within the of reconstruction, which calls for a new way of church presence in society, a way different from that which causes a non-reconstructive approach to Christian living in society. Mana again is vocal in this regard:

> We all know the wickedness of the actual world system.... What we need is to understand that the African Church has the duty, in her words and actions, in her quests and combats, to take an active part to liberate humanity of such wickedness that we all know. The world mission of African Christianity lays within this ambition. It is in function of that that a profound reform of our churches is necessary, urgent and indispensable. (*Mission* 259)

Key Christian doctrines and practices that confer fundamental identity are interdependent and reciprocal in relation to the task of reconstruction. In other words, reconstructive presence requires Christians to revisit long-standing doctrines and practices that have not, after years of experimentation, moved the church into social transformation.

Engaging in social transformation as church requires prophetic and pastoral actions following the metaphors of the biblical prophets such as Amos and Hosea.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 2 reviews selected literature and significant research done in the area of restoration in the realm of criminality. Biblical and theological foundations of church and social responsibility in relation to some doctrines and practices are studied. Contemporary therapeutic and nontherapeutic approaches to resolving antisocial behaviors are examined in light of our biblical and theological assumption in order that a fitting course of action may be discerned that is consistent with justice reconstruction. Chapter 3 presents a detailed explanation of the project's design, the research method, and the methods of data analysis. Chapter 4 accounts for the findings following the my interactions with participants. Chapter 5 presents and discusses the main findings, the ministry applications, and necessary concluding statements.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

This research aimed to describe current responses of churches regarding antisocial behaviors in the context of the failing criminal justice system in Cotonou and Porto-Novo. This description was intended to provide an alternative vision for a better response from urban Christian communities in Bénin. This literature review focused on a biblical/theological understanding of the church as a Christocractic community of integrated reconstruction. Accordingly, the theology of church constituted the ground for this study. Further review focused on contemporary therapeutic and nontherapeutic responses to persons who commit antisocial behaviors. To this end, this study focused on two general areas of response, namely the criminal justice system and the mental health community. As a result, this literature review offers a critical analysis of these responses in light of the theological underpinning of this study.

Antisocial Behaviors in Bénin in Historical Perspective

Recent increase of antisocial behaviors in the cities of Bénin justifies the necessity of this work. Occurrences of antisocial behaviors, though present in traditional Bénin, were nevertheless rare. The rarity of these behaviors can be explained by the overall societal structure within which people lived and the ways in which criminal cases were handled at the basic level.

American anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits accounts for this reality when he describes how Dahomey (traditional Bénin) dealt with disputes through the village chief (5-21). The chief, working in consultation with those under him and with the old men of the village, had among other functions that of trying cases at law and dealing with crimes

that he was empowered to punish (9). Generally, however, the chief stood "more in the position of conciliator than judge" (10); he was "more arbitrator than ruler" (10). Even when he was expected to act as a judge, the chief would summon "the neighbors of the disputants as witnesses and [would take] their testimony" (10). Herskovits rightly observes that in his time "the power of the village chief" (11) was already being "circumscribed by European control" (11). However, Herskovits was guilty of a sort of totality transfer when he announces that "the role of the French *administrateur* [original emphasis] does not differ greatly from that which was assumed by [Dahomean] higher officials in the days of European conquest" (11). Although this would imply that both leadership styles are similar, he readily acknowledges the painstaking attempts that the village chief makes to reconcile factional parties (11, 16). This conveys the reality that traditional leadership provides peacemaking practices, which disappeared with the advent of European way societal rule. Otherwise, in former Dahomey, only real necessity allowed the chief to "imprison only for a period not exceeding four days" (16), and he was not supposed to "punish by flogging with a whip or with sticks, but [could] only administer a beating with hand, and if he imposed a fine, the senior member of the offender's sib[11] [would have concurred]" (16). This process involved not only the offender and the victim but their sibs also and thus represents a picture of communal healing that has been eroded by colonial administration.

Cruel treatment of criminals was present in traditional Bénin as well but in a very restricted way. Such treatment happened only when someone had "been found guilty at

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[11] Dahomey's society was organized around a system of sibs. A sib was made of a number of extended families under the leadership of a sib-head or *xenugan*. Extended families were also organized around leaders called chieftains who were accountable to their sib-heads (Herskovits 156).

the court of the King" (Herskovits 20) in cases when a disagreement was taken from the village chief to the king court. Disagreement was brought to this level only if a person identified at the village level as a criminal disagreed and claimed innocence or if a real thief found at the village level did not accept the clause of the reconciliation process as carried out by the chief (19). Cruel treatment even at the king's court level happened only when the final verdict was punishment by death. In such a case, cruelty is not done abstractly but is justified by the necessity of avoiding the dying criminal to swear any oath against the king because traditional Béninese as other West Africans believed in the power of spoken words (21). For this reason, "a piece of wood was at once placed across his mouth, and pushed back until it was firmly held between the molars. It was then tied in place with cords in order to effectually gag the condemned and prevent him from speaking" before the accused person is executed (20-21). The preservation of greater social harmony and peace only could justify such treatment and decisions would be achieved after a process involving the guilty person's relatives. The event of Christ allows the gospel to dissipate cruel treatments of the guilty even while offering alternative ways of preserving what is sought through cruelty.

The strength of African traditional conception of a person also participated in the lessening of antisocial behaviors. Peter J. Paris comments very well on this conception:

> [T]he African person is never alone either in self-concept or in the perception of others. In fact one can rightly claim that the African person is related to the family as the part of a living organism is related to the whole. As the former cannot live apart from the latter, so the life of a person is wholly dependent on the family and its symbiotic functions of biological lineage, communal nurture, and moral formation. (101)

Such a concept of a person conveys a sense of shame and honor according to how one's way of life impacts positively or negatively the whole family or the whole tribe to which

one belongs. For this reason, "[t]he symbiotic functions of various societal practices contributed immensely to the ongoing task of moral formation, which [is] not complete until the end of the person's life" (109). When a person happens to be caught as a criminal, justice is sought not with him or her only but also with the active involvement of his or her whole family or community at large.

With an ingrained conception of a notion that one's life is "an essential part of family and the larger community" and that "each significant event in the individual's life is at one and the same time an important occasion in the life of the whole community" (Paris 110), both visible and invisible, most persons in traditional Bénin had difficulty engaging in antisocial behaviors or persisting in them.

Given the current state of urban settings in Bénin with regard to antisocial behaviors, this work maintains that letting the criminal justice system alone respond to the phenomenon of antisocial behaviors in the cities is inadequate. Current literature review concludes, against such traditional and contemporary criminal justice practices, that nobody should be treated in an inhumane manner.

Scriptural Basis

This study focused primarily upon the church's response to social illness. Old and New Testament Scriptures shed light on such a study. Eighth century BC prophets as well as the Lukan Jesus and his movement's responses to the social ills of their time can inspire the church response to antisocial behaviors in Bénin. This study discusses Amos and Hosea among the eighth century BC prophets and Jesus and his movement from Luke's perspective as metaphoric ecclesiological response to the social plight of the Bénin people.

Amos and Hosea as Urban Reconstructionists

The discovery of urban reconstructionists Amos and Hosea requires an understanding of the sociopolitical and religious contexts of their ministries.

The contexts of Amos and Hosea. Amos and Hosea's prophetic ministry took place in the eighth century BC in the states of Israel and Judea, which were two small kingdoms nestled in the mountain heartland of Palestine. A dominant issue in the international politics of that period was control over the land and sea trade of the eastern Mediterranean seaboard. Prosperity, peace, and expansion characterized Israel and Judea because "the wars that threatened the two kingdoms during the reign of the predecessors of Jeroboam and Uzziah were over" (Willoughby 205). This period led to Israel's domination of Gilead and the King's highway. The prosperity reaped in these circumstances "enveloped the royal family and prominent members of the society but did not trickle down to the poor" (206). D. N. Premnath provides a more profound social analysis of the situation, thus pointing beyond understanding the situation as being a mere unequal sharing of prosperity.

Through a systemic sociological approach to the study of eighth century prophets, Premnath offers that the period was, unlike any other periods prior, one period of tremendous political power and economic growth. In such a context the beneficiaries of the economic prosperity were the people of the ruling class who were able to gain significant amount of the economic surplus. Through this embezzlement people from the ruling class used the economic surplus for their own leisure and luxury and for extending their political control and military might. Amos' announcement conveys this reality: "I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; and the houses adorned

with ivory will be destroyed, and the mansions will be demolished, declare the Lord" (Amos 3:15, NIV). The accumulation of riches by the few is also criticized:

> You lie on beds inlaid with Ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. (Amos 6:4-6)

Hosea also alludes to the resulting social illness and the injustices and machination of the ruling class and their rivals as follows:

> Whenever I would heal Israel, the sins of Ephraim are exposed and the crime of Samaria revealed. They practice deceit, thieves break into houses, bandits rob in the streets; but they do not realize that I remember their deeds. Their sins engulf them; they are always before me. They delight the king with their wickedness, the prince with their lies. They are all adulterers, burning like an oven whose fire the baker need not stir from the kneading of the dough till it rises. On the day of the festival of our king the princes become inflamed with wine, and he joins hands with the mockers. Their hearts are like an oven; they approach him with intrigue. Their passion smolders all night; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire. (Hos. 7:1-6)

As a result of living in this way, the condition of the peasantry, which was not good in itself, deteriorated even more. Premnath argues that the peasantry was deprived gradually of their land through a process that he hypothesizes as "latifundialization" (20-24). Scholars define the term as "the process of land accumulation in the hands of a few wealthy elite to the deprivation of the peasantry" (1; Hong 118-19). More than just a phenomenon of land accumulation by the powerful from the powerless, this process entailed various aspects and different particular and causative factors. This process related broadly to the overall system of production (e.g., factors and nature of production) and distribution (e.g., consumption and system of exchange and distribution) with the resulting creation of more wealth to the wealthy and making the poor people poorer. As

Premnath says, "The quality of the lifestyle of the peasantry and the upper class were inversely proportionate to each other: the more extravagant and affluent the lifestyle of the rich was, the more desperate the life of the peasantry became" (139-40). The prophets responded to the situation and gave prophetic messages that "called for a total reversal of the situation" (141).

Although sociopolitically sensitive, preexilic prophets also saw deterioration in the relationship between God and Israel because Israel no longer kept the original active faith they had in their God. This deterioration of relationship between YHWH and his people led to God's people giving allegiance to other gods. In direct opposition to their covenantal response to love God alone, they loved other Canaanites gods. According to C. L. Seow, "Israel flirted with all manners of Canaanite religion. Many personal names on Hebrew seals discovered in Israel bear Canaanite theophoric elements, contrasting dramatically with the personal names of seals from Judah" (294). The prophet Hosea informs that Israel consecrated themselves to Baal Peor: "[W]hen they came to Baal Peor, they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved" (Hos. 9:10). Seow comments about the syncretism of the period saying: "They turned to the Canaanite gods instead, and attributed blessings and success to Baal" who was "thought to be the god of nature and fertility" instead of YHWH who gives and takes away (295). According to Hosea's message, then, Israel's sin is that they engaged in idolatry, which means giving allegiance to other gods instead of living according to the ways of the covenantal God. Amos saw the same problem through his reference to several pilgrimages to Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba as mentioned in Amos 4:4 and 5:5. In the midst of idolatrous practices, God's people still continued to offer freewill and

thanksgiving offerings and tithes and to hold various religious assemblies and festivals (Amos 5:21-23). They probably assumed that they were performing the cultic and ritual requirements necessary to appease YHWH (Birch 13). Bruce C. Birch believes that "Israel's cultic sin was compounded by priests who failed to teach the covenant law and ignored or participated in idolatrous practices" as well (13). Israelites thought that making sacrifices to God without altering their sinful behaviors would cover their sins.

Moreover their wealth and prosperity led them to conclude falsely that they were in the blessings of YHWH who certainly, as they thought, rewarded them by granting them riches. Caught in a bad theology of prosperity, they believed that their prosperity proved that they were righteous. The poor were oppressed, moral and ethical values were lacking, the court was corrupted, and truth and honesty were hated. As Birch indicates in his analysis, Amos saw in Israel's worship life a piety that has become an end in itself and rituals that have become self-justifying (171).

Within these sociopolitical and religious contexts, God raised, among others prophets, Amos and Hosea. A unifying understanding of the roles of Old Testament prophets is that they received and announced messages from YHWH to different kinds of people such as the nation of Israel, other nations, kings, and priests. Though their messages addressed various situations, as Lester L. Grabbe susgests, "[a] common theme to prophecies is a religious message, often about correct worship or activities to be encouraged or discouraged in the light of a particular religious view" (183). Amos and Hosea fit well with this understanding for their messages have religious tones with social and political implications. As God's spokespersons, they had a strong and profound understanding of their time from the perspective of the relationships between YHWH and

his people. Their engagement in the ministry of prophecy is justified by their conviction (from God) that the circumstances they were in were disastrous and needed to be addressed.

Hosea's and Amos' responses to their contexts. Hosea and Amos understood that the people they were addressing had a traditional and historical relationship with God. The people of Israel thought of themselves as the people of God. Commenting on Amos, J. A. Motyer suggests, "This people, Israel, had had ancestral dealings with God: he had brought them out of Egypt (3:1), constituted them as his people and given them their religion. It was for this reason and on this ground that Amos spoke to them" (17). With this remark Motyer highlights three theological understandings in Amos. First, in direct contrast to the slogan of the day that privilege brings security Amos understood instead that "privilege brings peril" (Amos 3:1). Whereas common thought that the privilege of being the people of God gave license to all kinds of vices, Amos said this very understanding brings peril instead. Second, the contemporary people of God cannot rely on their tradition of the past, however wonderful it has been, by neglecting the present degradation of their spiritual and moral commitments; rather YHWH demands an up-to-date commitment to himself (Amos 5:6), to moral values (5:14-15), and to personal and socials ethics (5:24). Third, Amos understood that religious doctrinal statements and practices are invalid unless they give evidence of normal relationships between YHWH and his people and between that people and other fellow human beings. A full submission toward YHWH and his commands and reverent hearing and receiving his words was needed. Honesty, considerateness, and unfailing concern for the needy and other human beings were to be cherished (Motyer 17-18). In a more socioeconomic sense, argues B. E.

Willoughby, Amos probably based his message on four ideological points: (1) the socioeconomic lifestyle of the Israelites was opposed to traditional values (2) socioeconomic reorganization without compassion to the powerless is not acceptable (3) the resulting oppression of the poor cannot be tolerated, and (4) participation in worship in spite of those sociopolitical and religious breakdowns gave a false sense of security (206).

Hosea knew that he was in a time of rebellion against YHWH, who had made a covenant with his people. He understood that the covenant demanded its partners' faithfulness. Compared with the suzerainty treaties of the Ancient Near East, in this covenant "YHWH is seen as the benevolent suzerain and Israel as the vassal who owed allegiance to YHWH" (Seow 295). God led Hosea to a deep insight into the situation at stake regarding what the state of that covenant was in his time. Hosea accounts for the insight he got through the scene he recounted regarding his wedding with Gomer. The name *Lo-ammi*, which means "not my people" (Hos. 1:9), suggests a serious breakdown of the Mosaic covenant according to which Israel was called "My own people" (Exod. 6:7). The actual unfaithfulness of Israel changed *ammi*, "my people," into *Lo-ammi*, "not my people." Furthermore, instead of YHWH's sinaitic revelation *ehyeh*, "I am" (Exod. 3:14), Israel's unfaithfulness changed the relationship into *Lo-ehyeh*, "I am not your God" (Hos.1:8). These changes happened because Israel violated the covenant by "showing allegiance to other gods, turning to foreign military power, and relying on her own military prowess" (Seow 296). Hosea understood all these and with his deuteronomic commitment he could not but condemn such deviations from the Yahwistic cult for the purpose of helping God's people to return to normality. Consistent with Old

Testament worldview is the fact that Hosea's time shows that religious relationship breakdowns always come with socioeconomic and political consequences.

Seong-Hyuk Hong uses sociological criticism and a metaphorical approach to explore Hosea's prophecy, arguing that the presence of monarchy during Hosea's time is foreign to Israel's way of life. This monarchy, with its centralized and controlling government, had destructive societal effects upon people and had also disrupted their relationships with Yahweh (161). Using the family model, Hong discusses the metaphor of promiscuity and marriage in Hosea in terms of a socioeconomic system. The foreignness of the monarchy system that has created a ruling elite to exert power upon their vassals, and the consequences it has generated is what Hong calls a socioeconomical illness that needs social healing; thus, promiscuity in Hosea stresses "the disintegration of social bonds and mutuality caused by the dynamics of agricultural intensification like commercialization and latifundialization, focusing on the social cleavage between the ruling elite as a promiscuous wife/mother and the peasantry as illegitimate children" (162). In response to such a social illness, social healing as exemplified by the marriage of Hosea "highlighted the importance of the restoration of social bonds and the reciprocity between the ruling elite and the peasant majority" (162). In the narrative then, God showed that he is someone who initiates restoration with those with whom his relationships are broken and thereby calls his people to do likewise toward those who are alienated in the society. If Israel was to be healed effectively, a rejection of what was foreign and was causing social uneasiness and a return to a society based on mutuality, reciprocity, and faithfulness to one another and to God was to be had (162).

Amos and Hosea understood the spiritual, social, and political aspects of the disintegration of their time as well as the consequences that such a disintegration bore upon the people. Their message, therefore, addressed not only the roots of the problems but also the consequences that were prevailing in the lives of people. Grabbe suggests that the religious message often takes "the form of criticism of the current religious practices and" condemns "the people, the nation, the king, or generally—all of them" (184). Amos and Hosea did address their audience this way. With Hosea, however, in addition to criticism, a pastoral concern is present because he had a strong message of condemnation of sin and yet of love and hope.

According to Premnath eighth century BC prophets referred to the process of latifundialization because they understood the socioeconomic dynamic very well. Rejecting the hypothesis that the prophets' observation was based on huge biases, he contends, "What the prophetic oracles reflect is an accurate picture of the process of latifundialization attested well in the comparative data derived from agrarian societies" (96). Therefore, the eighth century prophets' messages did denounce this phenomenon and called for a return to the right way of life. He finds that Amos 3:9-11 served to address the phenomenon of the growth of an urban center. As one component of the process, the growth of urban centers is an ally of the market-oriented economy, which "gives rise to the emergence of privileged social groups such as ruling class, officials of the royal administration, wealthy landowners, merchant and moneylenders" (108). In this context the cities, as administration centers, function by "extracting the surplus from the rural areas. The urban centers virtually lived off the rural areas" (108). Hence, for Premnath, the oracle contained in Amos 3:9-11 would have the leading citizens of

Samaria as the audience. Amos denounced that city as standing "as a symbol for the excesses of the urban culture" and called Ashdod and Egypt "to witness the violence and oppression in Samaria" (109). This denunciation was in reference to "the oppressive acts of the powerful ruling elite, which has been detrimental to the life of" the powerless (109-10).

A sign of this oppression is the presence of what Amos calls "fortified places," which are "residential quarters of the upper class" and thus "visible symbols of ... the ruling elite and their wealth" (Premnath110). Amos 6:1-3, therefore, denunciated the upper class of the society who was totally oblivious of the consequences of its action. Their refusal to see the impending danger was only a "hastening [of] the prospects of a violent judgment upon themselves" (111). Hosea also addressed the same issue of the growth of urban centers in Hosea 8:4 where he denounces such growth as being sought at the expense of adverse effects on the overextended poor and powerless people who, nevertheless, supported these centers economically and provided the workforce for the building projects. Space would not allow this study to discuss in detail Premnath's analyses concerning other manifestations of latifundialization such as militarization, extraction of surplus, lifestyle of the upper class, trade and commerce, market conditions, role of creditors, and the role of judicial courts.

The discussion of the role of the judicial court shows that issues pertaining to encounters between the powerless and the ruling elite did arise in the society. For this purpose, a multichambered gate area existed where legal businesses were conducted and justice was dispensed before the legal assembly (Premnath 170). Those who walked in the way of the Lord such as Amos knew that true justice that restored was not dispensed

in the assembly. The ruling elite, because of their power, always tried to dominate and to seal the fate of the poor and powerless. Almost no chance for them to be restored into full functioning in society existed because "the judicial officials were either part of the upper class or puppets in the hands of the ruling elite" (169), hence Amos' indictments, "[Woe to] those who change judgment into wormwood and abandon justice to the earth" (Amos 5:7), and, "They hate the one who arbitrates justly and abhor the one who speaks with integrity" (Amos 5:10). Amos' strategy was to address the systemic dysfunction of the society and the corrupt practices that "had become so pervasive that any official who dared to dispense [true] justice and act with integrity was scorned and despised" (169). Hosea and Amos found deficiencies in all those areas and prophesized about them based on their commitment to the ideal society as being the one in which relationships are restored.

Victor H. Matthews observes through Amos' utterances that he was an angry and harsh prophet. Given the backwardness of Israel, Amos "*condemns* [emphasis mine] the people of Israel for their social injustices and their unorthodox worship practices" (68). Even his reference to YHWH's grace is tantamount to Israel's duty to seek God and live and to "hate evil, love good, and maintain justice in the court" (Amos 5:6, 15). Amos's ministry was to tell people what they needed to know in order to live and all that was asked about his message was that the hearers needed to act accordingly. Using concrete imagery to capture the nature of their crime, Amos condemned the practices of bribing judges, of selling persons into debt slavery, of stealing from the poor, of unjust businesses, of using false balances, and of selling bags of contaminated grains (Amos 2:6, 8). While some people may resent Amos' judgmentalism, his ministry demonstrates the

sacredness of *all* human lives and teaches that mistreatment of *any* human being is incompatible with faithful allegiance to and worship of the God of Israel. For Donald E. Gowan, "Amos is not expressing a nationalistic, but a humanistic point of view, making one of the universal claims for the sovereignty of Yahweh. Whenever human beings are mistreated, Yahweh is offended, Amos says" (33). Amos also asserted the uselessness of Israel's worship because it was based on hypocrisy and without a true obedient faith as required by the covenant (Amos 2:7; 8:5).

Although Hosea's assessment of his times is not that different from that of Amos, he explicitly blamed the leadership of the nation in a way unique to him. For Hosea, "in addition to maintaining the holiness of the sanctuaries, it was the priests' responsibility to be teachers of the Torah" (Gowan 46), a job he found, like other prophets, was sorely neglected. He treated Israel's king and princes severely, voicing that they were all acting contrary to the will of YHWH (Hos. 5:1, 10; 7:3). Although his message of doom was not as clear as that of Amos, due to the powerful message of love conveyed through his marriage with Gomer, it was severe in its fashion. For Hosea, "Yahweh seeks to restore the nation and to forgive Israel" and "he will take Israel back *if* [emphasis mine] she renounces her Baals" (Matthews 77). The metaphor of Hosea's marriage with Gomer reflects this conditionality.

This discussion points to the kind of church that emerges from taking seriously the metaphor of the ministry of Hosea and Amos. Such a church will be a socially active and prophetic church. Getting its strength from God's special calling in the midst of sociopolitical and religious disasters such as Amos and Hosea, the church will be prophetic in the sense that its members and leaders will be capable of speaking and act in

order to subvert any dehumanizing power at work in the communities where they are. Faithfulness to and rootedness in the Scriptures received from God by tradition means, as it meant for Hosea and Amos, redemptive engagement with contemporary social ills for reconstructive purposes. As if Jesus was working intentionally from eighth century BC prophets' tradition, New Testament materials tell the story of Jesus and his movement who championed a similar redemptive engagement in the way they responded to the social ills of their time.

Jesus and His Movement as an Urban Reconstructionist

Many people want to know today the relevance of Christian faith in the face of dire social uneasiness. Generally, Christian believers and nonbelievers alike seriously doubt whether Christian faith really makes any difference regarding attempts to respond to tough issues such as antisocial behaviors. The presence of sound evangelical doctrinal statements does not seem to avoid such a doubt. Colin J. D. Greene sheds light on the issue in his discussion on cultural approaches to Christology. For Greene, current issues at the heart of Christological concerns point to two distinctive approaches to understanding Christ, namely the therapeutic and the apologetic approaches. The therapeutic approach is concerned with understanding Christ based on present realities whereas the apologetic approach is concerned with the Christ of the past (20). The apologetic approach seeks to provide an intellectual foundation to the belief that Jesus is the divine Son of God and the only savior of the world; thus, this approach pays little to no attention to current issues requiring therapeutic experiences (22). Discussing the therapeutic Christology after Moltmann, Greene makes the following observation:

> [Embracing therapeutic Christology] is to claim that we know Jesus primarily not through our own religious experience or through

> membership of the Church, important as both these may well be, but through a life which is conformed to his search for righteousness and infused with his love and compassion for his fellow human beings ("christopraxis"). We only really know the Messiah when we are committed to, and immersed in, his messianic mission to the world. This entails that we recognise that Christology is eschatologically determined. The mission of the Messiah to reconcile, restore and redeem is still underway. There is an inevitable eschatological proviso to all our Christology.... No Christological confession can finally grasp the full significance of Jesus because his own history of engagement with the world is not yet finished.... We join him on the way in the context of one particular episode of history and we seek to interpret him to our contemporaries as the one who still heals our diseases and infirmities. (21-22)

Needed, therefore, is the sort of Christological formulations that unleash believers into performing Christ's reconciling, restorative, and redemptive works amid current decays related to antisocial behavior. Based largely on Lukan narratives, Jens Soering does a similar therapeutic reflection on Christ's death when he challenges the predominant theoretical approach to Christ. Soering urges those who witness the degradation of antisocial behaviors in spite of the increase of retribution to see Jesus as a condemned criminal who was executed beside two thieves. For Soering the fact that Jesus died a cruel death on a cross should make every believer an adamant opponent to human mistreatment and to capital punishment. The mercy and compassion Jesus showed to the repentant thief should help believers to expect and rejoice in the transformation of prisoners, some of whom do experience new life in Christ (112-24).

The fact that Jesus loved the social outcasts and those who broke the law so that he earned the name "friends of sinners" (Luke 7:34)[12] is supposed to call forth a different

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[12] Joel B. Green, using James D. G. Dunn's insights, comments that a "sinner" in Jesus' era would be similar to the present-day criminals, "one whose behavior departs from the norms of an identified group whose boundaries are established with reference to characteristic conduct; that is, "sinner" receives concrete explication especially in terms of group definition: a "sinner" is an "outsider" (85).

kind of church in society. From the way Jesus related to the outcast and the marginalized, one understands that Jesus presented a different way of relating to the "criminals" of his time as if he was saying, "You may call these people 'sinners,' but people like [them] are precisely those whom I have come to extend the call to discipleship" (Green, *Theology* 85), the grace of healing and release, and the fellowship with Jesus around meals (86-87).

Jesus' presence on the cross was the highest expression of the consequence of his continued solidarity with the most socially despised. One way to account for the cross in this manner is how Luke worded what he had to say in Luke 23:32. Almost all the major modern translations used most often render this passage in less shocking manners:

"Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed" (NIV);

"Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him" (NRSV);

"There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death" (NKJ);

"Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him" (NLT); and,

"On conduisait en même temps deux malfaiteurs, qui devaient être mis à mort avec Jésus" (LSG).

These translations communicate to readers that the other two persons who were crucified with Jesus were the criminals. Translators want to make readers understand that only the other two men on the cross were criminals but Jesus was not. While such a rendering is true on one level, the full solidarity of Christ with the outcasts does not come out clearly. Such solidarity is what the Church is called to embody today. In Greek the passage reads, "Ηγοντο δὲ καὶ ἕτεροι κακοῦργοι δύο σὺν αὐτῷ ἀναιρεθῆναι (BibleWorks7 Luke23:32)

and can be transliterated "*egonto de kai eteroi kakourgoi duo sun auto anairethenai.*" A more literal translation would read, "Two other criminals also were led to be put to death with him." The New English Translation's version of this particular passage resonates with the view expressed here: "Two other criminals were also led away to be executed with him" (Luke 23:32). With this translation readers are allowed to understand that on the cross Jesus has become a criminal in addition to "the two other criminals." This coheres with the Isaianic vision of Israel as the suffering servant who "willingly submitted to death and was *numbered with the rebels* [emphasis mine], when he lifted up the sin of many and intervened on behalf of the rebels" (Isa. 53:12). According to Luke, the evangelist, Christ fulfilled this Isaianic vision. Soering expresses the consequence for the believers to embrace the truth that Christ fulfilled that vision:

> Luke recognized an equivalence between Christ and the thieves that is apparently considered too shocking by modern translators.... For the earliest Christians, however, becoming a prisoner was nothing to be ashamed of. "Whoever serves me must follow me," their master told them, so virtually all of the apostles did time behind bars and were eventually executed by the state—just like Jesus.... Perhaps those early followers of the Way accepted a convict's death so readily because they had a deeper insight into the full meaning of the cross than we do today. (2)

Some Christian sensibilities may concede to the rightness of the treatment the other two criminals while faulting the way Jesus was treated. Such an analysis only serves to perpetuate the treatment of contemporary outcasts in the same manner as in Jesus' time. As Soering rhetorically argues, God the Father wants to convey, through the cross, that human beings should not do such things to *any* of his children (3-4). Jesus' method of solidarity with the poor until death by which, according to Luke, he brought together "[r]eligion, economics, politics, groups identity,... and other social ingredients ... closely interwoven, not presumed to be separated as they often are at present" (Green, *Theology*

16) is what is needed for truly standing against the social decay of contemporary life. Luke, through the second volume of his work, the book of Acts, argues that early followers of Jesus were faithful recipients of Jesus' way of life. He communicates such a message through his telling of their story: They suffered like Jesus, died like Jesus, healed like Jesus, were condemned like Jesus, and lived in communities of economic and spiritual sharing similar to Jesus' ideal of community in the Gospel of Luke. The close imitation of Jesus' way of responding to social illness caused his movement to be called "the Way" or "followers of the Way." As such the movement was targeted in order to be extinguished in the same manner in which Jesus was also killed (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). In this manner, Jesus' earliest movement fearlessly embodied God's subversive agenda for the redemption of society and stands in contrast to the majority of contemporary evangelical churches that witness social disintegration all around them with indifference.

Contemporary African Theology of Reconstruction

As mentioned previously this work was also based on a reconstruction theology of the Church. Theology of reconstruction is a contemporary interest that arose from sociopolitically sensitive African theologians. Influenced by the works of Paul Tillich, Martin Buber, and Karl Jaspers, East African theologian Mugambi launched the reconstruction paradigm as an attempt to bring to life African traditional cultural values, myths, and symbols for the purpose of recasting them in symbiosis with the gospel and recasting them to meet the needs of African churches and societies (Dèdji 45-46). In radical opposition to Bultmann's long cherished project of demythologization, Mugambi defines reconstruction as a sort of "re-mythologization' whereby the socially engaged

African theologian discerns new symbols and new metaphors in which to recast the central message of the gospel" (qtd. in Dèdji 46, 66-67). This vision is cast in order to provide the church with a new theological basis for the pastoral nature of the answers needed for African civil society's questions.

At the end of the twentieth century, many African civil societies, dissatisfied with the promise of modernity, want to know the church's answers on multiple issues such as individual and social morality, economics, ecology, culture and education, and justice in society. For Mugambi, if a church is to respond to these questions, that church must be equipped for the task of reconstruction in a multidisciplinary and ecumenical way (*Christian Theology* 96-104). The urgency of social transformation as the aim of reconstruction work impresses upon African theologians and church leaders, according to Mugambi, to search for alternative ways to increase their Christian influence in urban centers. Mugambi discusses two things that will be necessary in such an endeavor, namely, ecumenism and inclusivism. Recalling the historical contributions of early African Christians for the preservation of unity in the first centuries of Christianity ("Ecumenical Movement" 5), Mugambi argues that "denominational allegiance may have been important in the [modern] Evangelisation of Africa, but today African Christians need to consult [across denominational lines] in order to help build an authentically African Church" (7-8; see also 6, 26; "Problems" 55-56). He envisions such an ecumenism to function in a Christocentric way, that is, in a way that focuses on Christ rather than on particularities:

> Theologically, Christians do not have any option over the question of Christian unity. In the teachings of both Jesus and Paul, the unity of the Church is emphatically mandated. Christians are challenged to shed their differences and interests for the sake of Christian unity. The centre of that

> unity is Jesus Christ, and all Christians without exception are challenged to focus their identity on Jesus rather than on any apostle, saint or doctrine. ("Ecumenical Movement" 7)

His position regarding Christian unity comes from his discontent with the undeniable fact that missionary enterprise in Africa has brought European and North American church conflicts into African lands as is obvious through denominational segregation on the continent. Likewise, many Africans wonder today why a local church in Africa must necessarily bear the denominational name of its European or American parent church whereas that local church in Africa has a birth story and could meaningfully relate to a name that emerges from its life story.

Mugambi is right with his call for a united African Church, for "[a] divided Church will remain scandalous to the gospel. A differentiated Church will manifest the richness of human responses to the gospel, provided that the differences in ecclesiology are mutually recognized and respected" ("Ecumenical Movement" 10). By advocating for inclusivism, Mugambi argues that local churches must work as tactic synchronizers by interacting with other agencies in the process of facilitating social transformation. In other words, from Mugambi's perspective, the time when the Church was solely concerned with producing spiritual giants and reflecting only on spiritual things is past. Now is the time for theologians and church leaders to construct an interdisciplinary nexus with people of other fields such economists, physicians, social workers, and lawyers, in order to highlight social reconstruction as the ultimate aim for effective management of society. For the purpose of this research, Mugambi has provided great theological starters, namely, theology as reconstruction, done by united churches in Africa in consultation with people of other non-spiritual disciplines. More reflections pertaining to

the specific domain of law and justice are needed for the purpose of this study, and South African Charles Villa-Vicencio provides such information.

Villa-Vicencio is keenly concerned with interdisciplinary work as well. He demonstrates his interest in his book on theology of reconstruction, which he wrote with theological, political, economic, philosophical, and legal insights. It addresses the issue of human rights in the struggle for the advent of a more equitable and just society. For Villa-Vicencio the time has now come for the church in Africa to provide a distinctive voice on issues that cause illness to the broader world at the regional, national, and international levels. Although in that enterprise the church must engage the secular world, Villa-Vicencio argues, the church's responses must be pastoral and grounded upon serious theological reasoning. Starting from speaking to its members, the church must provide distinctive voices and Christian responses on issues of general concerns, and not fall into the temptation of giving mere secular responses. Villa-Vicencio's book follows the same pattern as he engages secular ideas by keeping his discussion within a deeply cherished theological and Christian perspective. This engagement of secular ideas leads Villa-Vicencio to suggest a theology of reconstruction that "cannot be written in isolation from a range of social disciplines" and can yet be able "to justify the theological reaching into politics, economics and law-making" (11).

Grounded in the South African experience of apartheid, the basic thrust of Villa-Vicencio's theology of reconstruction is to further the previous liberation theologians' "no" to sociopolitical and economic atrocities of the apartheid regime by saying "yes" to those processes that are able to create social structures and practices worthy of a kinder social order (8). Such a theology is postexilic because it is constructed after the metaphor

of the return of the Babylonian exile in the postexilic period instead of the liberation theology construction after the Exodus metaphor (9; Mugambi, *Christian Theology* 74). Especially important for the purpose of this work is Villa-Vicencio's discussion about theology and law. Aware that Western missionary enterprise in Africa has resulted in either political passivism to legitimate status quo or political revolution by resisting it, he suggests that theological thinking should now contribute to the urgent task of nation building and sociopolitical reconstruction. Within the framework of the theology of reconstruction, he argues, theology demands law "to provide a life-giving sense of order and purpose to society" (11). Encounter between theology and jurisprudence is at the center of the postexilic theology in the task of reconstruction. Such an encounter is impossible, however, if it does not reject the privatization of God and see his presence at the center of all life and of all life activities. Acknowledging God in this way consists in "the proclamation of the public meaning of the gospel," decentering the gospel thereby from its privatized currency (12). Following Dietrich Bonhoeffer's thought, Villa-Vicencio believes that the public reconstruction task of the gospel can be done in a religionless way, that is, the proclamation of the public meaning of the gospel "without drawing attention to the Church" (12).

The liberatory theology of reconstruction, Villa-Vicencio argues, is about working for "the dreams of the oppressed to become reality" and to be "translated into political programmes and law-making that benefit those who have longed for, and fought for, the new age, while protecting the new society against the abuses which marked past oppression" (29). Given the context of Africa with its baggage of colonialism and neocolonialism that created wealth for a few and poverty for many, theological emphasis

that "promotes such material and ideological resources as are necessary to facilitate the transfer of resources and power from the *few* (the rich and the powerful) to the *many* (the poor and powerless; 39). Whereas most of contemporary African Christian ministers have been equipped from a modern theory based perspective, reconstruction theology with its agenda of nation building, points to another direction:

> If an agenda of nation-building does not take the church beyond debate into the actual process of shaping the character of society, the church will again have failed to demonstrate that its pronouncements on social justice ought in any way to be taken seriously by those whose concern it is to reconstruct society in the wake of devastation left behind by dying and dead societies of corruption. (Villa-Vicencio 40)

The practical nature of reconstruction calls for thinking about its operative method.

If much of the traditional Christian theology, which operated through transfer of knowledge from the classroom to the realities of ministry context, are often at odds following this exchange, reconstruction theological method offers something different:

> Theology of reconstruction is pre-eminently a contextual theology. It explicitly addresses the present needs of particular society. It is at the same time a retroactive theology, seeking to correct the causes of previous suffering and conflict in society. The critical analysis of past and present structures is an essential ingredient of the theological task. National-building theology must emerge in relation to posing tough and uncomfortable questions about the economy, international alliances, national development programmes and such local issues that affect the lives of ordinary people at a material and spiritual level. For this to happen church leaders and theologians continually need to be exposed to the insights of critical economists, social scientists and political analysts. Theology and ministry outside of this encounter is at best simply irrelevant. (Villa-Vicencio 41)

The vision expressed here, if implemented, serves at helping church leaders become knowledgeable in areas of life that they have been taught to abandon based on a reductionistic view of ministry.

Another important scholar in the matter of reconstruction is the French theologian and philosopher Mana whose works cross several disciplines including psychology, poetry, literature, politics, ethics, education, biblical studies, philosophical anthropology, and fundamental theology (Dèdji 93). As a reconstructionist Mana is not concerned with critiquing or blaming the West for Africa's present condition but with questioning Africans' very *imaginaire* (life-world), which causes them to lack prophetic vision and action and to be in connivance with corrupt political structures. He makes this concern clear in his *Christ d'Afrique* (Christ of Africa) where he launches clear criticism on church leaders of Togo, Zaire, and the Congo whom he sees as "the illustration of a spiritual *imaginaire* totally sick" (143). What Africa urgently needs, according to Mana, are Christian leaders who think theologically about African current social realities without dissociating religion from social realities.

His own works exemplify this perspective as he always deals with issues with an evenhanded interaction among politics, economics, culture, ethics, and spiritual realities. He is always geared towards practicality or, more precisely, towards ethics grounded in an innovative reading of the Bible so as to allow the sacred texts to speak transformatively to Africans' current existential crises. He sees African theologians who advocate "identity theologies" (adaptation and inculturation) as too preoccupied with reacting to Western culture-based theologies that they miss the urgent task of reconstructing contemporary Africa. His words to those theologians are more than negative:

> Locked in a quest for an abstract identity that is not relevant to the very challenges of our time, and silted up in a partisan oppositions between Africa which is absolutely spiritual and the West which is irremediably materialist, [advocate of identity theologies] have made up a Christ who is

> away from the current contingencies and the colossal political, economical and socio-cultural problems that African societies are confronting today.... [It follows therefore that] the theoretical paradigm of cultural identity appears like a lyrical culturalism without energy to resist the antagonism with the West in its very location: in political and economical spheres, as well as in scientific creativity. (*Foi Chrétienne* 44)

Taking issues with liberation approaches to theology, he suggests that anthropological and political approaches to the enterprise of liberation should have led to a "Christology of battle" that denies and counters any dehumanizing force that destroys African societies (*Christ d'Afrique* 98). Mana's undeniable merit is to take African theologians' legitimate concern with identity to the next level. If reconstruction is to happen in Africa, it must happen through those African church leaders who have come to terms first with current and desirable identity in Christ instead of living indefinitely with theological and practical masks.

Mana's is a notion of theology wedded with ethics (Dèdji 118) in contrast to the dominant paradigm of theology divorced from ethics. The value of such a theology is recognized not just for the good things it tells but more for "what it is doing for the oppressed.... [Good theology] presses for the active engagement of the Church in socio-political affairs, in its search for the truth which shall make [everyone] free" (118). Thus, such a theology forms a church that is actively engaged in sociopolitical unrest and "dares to take upon itself, as did its Lord, to side with the poor and downtrodden and to liberate the oppressed" (118). With a reconstruction approach to Christian faith in Africa, no longer will churches be content to recite their warm spiritual feelings within the confines of their church buildings to the satisfaction of their Western parents. No longer should dogmatic theology be allowed to be a means to communicate a downloaded theological system that is disconnected from African realities. Theology, if it seeks to

reconstruct society, must be converted into practical ethical discussions "through which, according to the scheme of the biblical revelation, human being[s], society and reality are to be made anew" (119). The aforementioned discussion on African reconstructive approach to theologizing compels African churches to a different way of seeing and living in their communities, of seeing themselves, and of seeing their mission. Placed within the framework of responding to antisocial behaviors, this discussion leads to engaging literature pertaining to how the church can possibly understand this escalating phenomenon in order to become a reconstructing instrument in that area.

Antisocial Behaviors and Their Treatments

Given the variegated and confusing voices of the dominant literature in relation to antisocial behaviors, this work argues that appropriate response should focus on building healthy community, family, society, culture, and discipleship as the loci for intervention. A Christian engagement of these elements prompts the recovery of healthy visions regarding numerous points such as treatment of antisocial behaviors, nature of personhood, salvation, and commitment to the possibility of change of persons.

This study discusses therapeutic and nontherapeutic treatment of antisocial behaviors. Nontherapeutic treatment expressed through retributive law enforcement is the major form of response to antisocial persons these days. Therapeutic approaches are used independently from or alongside nontherapeutic ones and depend on specific clinical approaches hold as psychological cause(s) of ASPD or antisocial behaviors. Experts argue several (competing and complementing) views as to the factors of ASPD. The following discussion is a review of these factors and, consequently, a discussion of the clinical insights that come out of the discussion on the factors that this work highlights.

Causes and Treatment Methods of ASPD/Antisocial Behaviors

Scholars do not have a united understanding of what the causes for antisocial behaviors are. Some experts draw a physiological or hereditary link to antisocial personality. In that line of thought, if a father is antisocial then perhaps the likelihood is that his son will also be antisocial. To this end experts have undertaken to document familial concentration of crime and have concluded crime to be a general characteristic of the population that they studied (Farrington, Barnes and Lambert 1, 46-47; Farrington, Jolliffe, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, and Kalb 595-96; Rowe and Farrington 199-201). The main thesis of these researchers is that concentration of criminality within a family presupposes a genetic influence on antisocial behavior, accounting thus for the presence of an antisocial gene at work in families with extensive antisocial behaviors history. Experts have confirmed the biological nature of antisocial behavior in adults and revealed also that genetic factors are more important in adults than in antisocial children or adolescents wherever shared environmental factors are more important (Moffit 534). Some studies considered family environment as well as the percentage of adoptees separated at birth from parents. They found that ASPD in the biological parents predicted ASPD in adopted children (534-35).

Some studies have gone so far as to conclude that the evidence for genetic influences outweighs the evidence for environmental influences within the family (Harris 5-30, 53-78; Pinker 8-25; Rowe 22-54). Experts whose research leads to a contrary conclusion counter these studies. In fact, some scholars have seriously opposed such an understanding. Kaylor expresses such a contrary view when he says, "Biological links are intriguing, but it is still not clear whether biological differences are the cause or effect of

ASPD. The impact that biological factors have in the development of ASPD remains equivocal" (250). Other scholars call for an understanding of interplay between genetics and environment as the cause of antisocial behavior because, particularly in the case of antisocial behaviors, "the effect of an environmental risk may be even larger than [usually] reported among the subgroup of individuals having a vulnerable genotype" (Moffit 537). Therefore, as T. E. Moffit says, "It is unlikely that any behavior is wholly determined by genes" (537).

Other than the genetic factor, scholars and practitioners often discuss the environmental factor. According to this view, bad parenting, the mother smoking heavily during pregnancy, unskilled or inconsistent child discipline, and frank neglect and abuse of children are believed to be settings that are favorable for the formation of antisocial personality later in adult life. Some authors establish that bad parenting and aggression towards children play a central cause in leading theories of antisocial behaviors (Lahey, Moffit, and Caspi 5-15; Thornberry 8-14). Comparing the effects of shared environment across ten psychiatric disorders, a recent investigation has shown that such effects were stronger for antisocial personality and conduct disorder than for affective, anxiety, or substance disorders (Kendler, Prescott, Meyers, and Neal 929-31). More recently, Moffit's review has shown how behavioral-genetic studies are documenting the fact that many putative environmental risk factors do have environmental mediated effects on antisocial behaviors and that some of these risk factors interact with genetic vulnerability (547).

The psychodynamic explanation of antisocial behavior is, like the previous explanation, related to the kind of environment in which persons exhibiting such

behaviors have grown up. The environment at this level is believed to be intrinsically about parents or primary caregivers or about the primary caregiving environment. This theory also has some biological components in its understanding of personality disorders; hence, it accounts for "the pathology of aggression seen in patients with severe personality disorders" as reflecting "the confluence of constitutional and environmental factors" (Kernberg and Caligor 130). The theory thus does justice to the genetic and constitutional variation in intensity, rhythm, and thresholds of activation of aggression. The theory also "incorporates the role of physical pain, psychic trauma, and severe disturbances in early interactions with caretakers in intensifying aggression as a motivational system by triggering intense negative effects" (130). Within that understanding the antisocial personality, perceived as the most severe of the personality disorders, is characterized both by a lack of any internalized system of values and by the greatest severity of identity diffusion among the personality disorders (Kernberg 23-34).

Another explanation of antisocial personality disorder focuses on individuals' cognition and behaviors. This theory believes that those with antisocial personality suffer from learned faulty beliefs that have significant impact in their destructive behaviors. The cognitive theory also believes that inherited predispositions as well as traumatic life experiences may cause antisocial personality disorders in individuals although not in a simple and straightforward way (Pretzer and Beck 65-70). In the cognitive view, a personality disorder, such as antisocial, is a term used to refer to an individual "with *pervasive, self perpetuating cognitive-interpersonal cycles* [original emphasis] which are dysfunctional enough to come to the attention of mental health professionals" (61). In addition antisocial personality can be formed through the many processes involving

social learning as parents or significant others influence the developing child through verbal communication, explicit teaching, modeling of behaviors, contingencies imposed on children, and through the cultural influences they transmit.

Still another explanation of ASPD is the interpersonal reconstructive theory of personality disorder. This theory, according to Kernberg and Caligor, is advanced by L. S. Benjamin and represents an eclectic proposition, offering a psychodynamic understanding with cognitive-behavioral therapy principles (140). The interpersonal reconstructive approach is based on attachment theory and the object-relational model that explains that very early internalized relationships become the model for future relationships so that adults are able to carry maladaptive patterns from early ages into their present relationships. Related to this theory is the attachment idea according to which attachment experiences might affect brain development and thus damage the neurological basis of personality (143). Past experiences might also determine children's learning and negatively affect later capacity for effective emotional regulation (143), which can impair behavioral functioning. Another way in which early attachment might influence later antisocial personality is through its effects on "internal working models" of self (organismic model) and others (environmental model; Bowlby, *Attachment* 80-83). According to J. Bowlby, a child caregiver's interaction patterns become encoded in the form of such models—sets of beliefs and expectations from other people (82-83). Attachment theory explains later antisocial behaviors as follows:

> [Children] whose caregivers are not responsive but rather are neglectful, intrusive, or abusive are thought to develop negatively toned mental representations, enhancing the likelihood that they enter adult relationships with less comfort and confidence and with poorer prospects for relationship stability. (Meyer and Pilkonis 236)

This theory holds that children who have entered adulthood with lack of comfort and confidence in their relationships will be likely to disturb others' peace and well-being. Moreover, Bowlby explains more about the childhoods of antisocial persons:

> [They] are found to have been grossly disturbed by the death, divorce, or separation of the parents, or by other events resulting in disruption of bonds, with an incidence of such disturbance far higher than is met with any comparable group, whether drawn from the general population or from psychiatric casualties of other sorts. (*Making and Breaking* 72)

Bowlby sees that people who have been through these experiences in their childhoods are prone to developing antisocial behaviors or that current antisocial behaviors can be explained by such past experiences. .

Within the attachment theory perspective, the dismissing attachment plays a key role in many cases of antisocial personality, making an antisocial person a self-centered and contemptuous being in relation to others (Meyer and Pilkonis 263). Attachment theorists believe that the interface of both fearful and dismissing attachment conveying to children that they must not be lovable and thus promoting a negative view of self creates antisocial tendencies later in life. The interpersonal theory, therefore, suggests that antisocial persons often have histories of abuse, neglectful parenting, emotional trauma, and bad modeling. They experience unpredictable discipline, had parents who were inconsistent and put their own needs first, learned little about sharing and being interdependent with others, develop a heightened need to establish their own independence from "bad" parents, and control others rather than be controlled. As a result they later experience deep feelings of vulnerability. The rejection and lack of love they experience leads to shame. To avoid experiencing these feelings, they repress and deny

their own feelings to the point that they can no longer empathize with other people because to do so would be to recognize their own painful past.

One last cause of ASPD is the cultural factor. Kaylor discusses two characteristics of contemporary American culture that favor the widespread of ASPD, particularly among men. She indicates that American "patriarchalism" and individualism are essential factors encouraging aggressive or antisocial behaviors in society. The first, patriarchalism, is manifested by "the ideology of male power forming the basis for social relation, causing an uneven balance of power that has been imputed as the basis for the victimization of women and children" (250-51). The second, individualism, subordinates the goal of the group or community to individual goals, creating a sense of independence and lack of concern for others. She believes that these two characteristics of Western culture are spread and encouraged through television and movies along with aggression and violence as their logical consequences. Although many debate about the effect of TV viewing on violent behavior, Kaylor says that "the vast extent of violence portrayed in the media and the glorification of violence creates the context for implicit cultural acceptance of antisocial behaviors" (252). L. Bogart expresses well the effect of audiovisual media on human behavior:

> Constant exposure to television's imagery characters, settings, and situations molds the public's expectations of the surrounding reality. The fantasy distortions of TV fiction are transferred into everyday life, and conduct depicted by television is easily taken to be acceptable conduct, even when it includes the antisocial. (286)

Given phenomenological realities, only an overt stretching of things could lead one to deny the effects of TV viewing on human behaviors. Television images and actions have a powerful force of suggestion that make for an easy assimilation of the behaviors

displayed therein even when viewers may not be intentional about performing those behaviors.

As the survey of the causes of antisocial personality shows, practitioners do not agree on one single cause. The best alternative in that case in the realm of social sciences is making a case for a combination of many factors leading to antisocial behaviors outcome (i.e., a dysfunctional family component, inadequate parenting, and inconsistent discipline or lack thereof). Such a case certainly points to the importance of intervening at multiple levels for a successful response to the issue. This conclusion is Gaga's in his analysis of the current ineffectiveness of preventive and repressive measures against antisocial behaviors in Bénin:

> The insufficiency of repression due to the weakness of punishment, the outmoded nature of repressive laws, the bad condition of incarceration, and the many errors in supervising prisons in addition to corruption, complicity of certain security forces in charge of security and justice have led to the escalation of criminality and have sowed a legitimate mistrust among the larger population. (55)

This analysis points to multiple factors that might explain the growth of antisocial behaviors in Bénin. Given the high level of concern among the population this study discusses multiple available responses to the phenomenon for a better appreciation of what experts in the field have to offer. Because Gaga sees a weakness in Bénin criminal justice as a reason for the escalation of antisocial behaviors, this study discusses that system of repression.

Nontherapeutic Treatment of Antisocial Behaviors

This paper discusses both therapeutic and nontherapeutic responses commonly applied to antisocial behaviors. Each treatment offered to those with antisocial behaviors largely depends upon a particular understanding of what causes these behaviors. Despite

existing approaches of treating personality disorders, professionals and scholars admit that personality disorders in general and antisocial and borderline personalities in particular are difficult to treat. This difficulty is explained by the fact that no unique treatment for personality disorders exists but a variety of ways in understanding what really causes them are available. I discuss therapeutic approaches in line with the aforementioned causes of antisocial behaviors. As already stated, this study makes no difference between psychotic disorders and nonpsychotic disorders because such differences are hard to delineate; hence, this study critically assess treatments applicable to all antisocial behaviors in two categories: nontherapeutic treatment and therapeutic treatment.

Nontherapeutic measures are approaches taken toward antisocial persons that do not necessarily seek to provide any therapeutic help in their current situation. Three measures of this nature exist: natural course, inpatient milieu, and correctional or forensic milieu (Reid and Gacono 847-48). The natural course suggests that antisocial symptoms and behaviors will become less prominent late in life, although the basic character structure will still remain. Natural course is an approach that expects antisocial persons to burn out as they age. Researchers indicate, however, that many antisocial persons still remain at high risk for violent offense much later in life (Quinsey, Harris, Rice, and Cormier, 75-101, 193-217). The inpatient milieu approach assumes that any traditional program or voluntary milieu addresses the characterological aspect of antisocial adults. This approach supposes that when put together in a place where discharged antisocial persons get together, over time, their character may get better. Studies report, however, that the majority of ASPD inpatients left the milieu prematurely due to their history of

felony and conviction, repeated lying and unresolved legal situations (Reiss, Grubin, and Meux 99-100). Accordingly, only successful community reintegration after discharge from legal offenses assures fewer future offenses (103-04). Correctional or forensic approaches consist in arresting, sentencing, and punishing wrongdoers. This approach has proven not to have any long lasting effect on antisocial symptoms as experts conclude, "People with antisocial personality do not generally change their antisocial behaviors after repeated incarcerations" (Quinsey, Harris, Rice, and Cormier 221).

Incarcerations and correctional justice are the prized responses to antisocial persons in Bénin in terms of prevention and repression (Gaga 42-46). To that end, police forces of Cotonou and Porto-Novo, given the high rate of crime in both cities, have agreed on a common strategy of prevention: keeping regular watch on insecure crossroads, dispersing some renowned network of gangs in both cities, fighting against illicit traffic of drugs, preventing mobile resellers who overcrowd certain places so as to favor theft and gun-based shoplifting (43). Given the impossibility of police forces to master the phenomenon, a recent shift in prevention strategies has occurred whereby nonpolice force persons who are valid strong young men put under the supervision of local political authorities are hired to keep watch overnight. Gaga describes the shift when he says, "Armed with lamp torches and whistles ... [they] erect roadblocks on different crossroads that lead to quarters and proceed to systematic checking and identity control and can," like police forces, "proceed to arrest any suspicious individual" (44).

Usually the logic of forensic response to antisocial behaviors is understood as an application of justice or rule of law. This study, however, looks at justice in term of one that reconstructs in two ways. The first way is that justice transpires in a certain kind of

relationship between rich and poor. The second way is that justice comes alive in the midst of chaos brought about by an offense done to a victim (individual or group). The facts that currently characterize urban life in Cotonou and Porto-Novo justify the crucial need of these two aspects of justice. Justice is therefore achieved when there is peace between rich and poor and between victims and offenders.

Perhaps the absence of this kind of justice explains the fact that despite current legal measures, the crime rate is still escalating and the peace desired by the population is yet to come (Gaga 44). Current repressive measures in Bénin are based on 1946 France's penal code, which France adapted for the French West African countries formerly under its colonial authority (47). Despite the so-called independence that Bénin gained in 1960 the colonially inherited text has been adopted as the Bénin penal code seven years later, that is, on 7 August 1967 and has remained the Bénin penal code to this day. As the saying goes, prisons are schools for criminals, and violent people to excel in their wrongdoing and significant events have led public opinion to see some police forces and some magistrates as collaborators and partisans with some gang groups (56). For this reason, the populace seeks to get rid of antisocial persons once they come out of prisons. As a colonial heritage, the criminal justice system has proven to be inefficient and hardly successful in the face of growing antisocial behavior. This assertion is the result of a study undertaken by Gnonhossou who found that given the inexistence of reeducation programs for prisoners and the pitiful conditions in which they are left during their jail times, antisocial behaviors are far from being eradicated from their lives and from society:

> [S]ome ex-prisoners, having been liberated after the purging of their wrongdoing in prison become fear-inspiring elements to the populations.

> As a result, the manifestation of a climate of insecurity is shown through certain social acts and facts. The most remarkable social act is the return of popular lynching [vindicte populaire], whereby an offended populace gets justice by executing an antisocial person either on the street or at a public place. (*Etudes* 20)

Popular vindication, although illegal in Bénin, is still well practiced due to the loss of confidence of many people toward Bénin's criminal justice's response to antisocial persons. The ineffectiveness of repressive approach in Bénin calls for taking to account Christopher D. Marshall's objections to current criminal justice practices (99-128). Of all the objections he lays out, this study discusses two (i.e., the biblical and theological ones).

Antoinette Bosco, a mother of murder victims, decided not only to offer to forgive a "horrendous offender" but also becomes active in pleading for the end of the death penalty (57-73). Bosco was severely criticized by some Christians who received her position with indignation as she defended the end of death penalty. Those Christians use biblical passages to justify their defense of punishment and the death penalty as the best response to control crime (60, 72). Marshall successfully argues that although the idea of retributive reaction from God exists in the Bible, "[b]iblical law and justice operate according to certain values, convictions, and assumptions that are largely foreign to the model of retributive justice in the Western tradition" (122). In the Old Testament setting, the context of retribution is a covenantal one where "criminal offending was viewed by Israel as a breaching of covenant relationships" (124). The twofold concern in that setting were overcoming or constraining the *intrinsic* consequences (not an outside infliction of punishment) of the evil act and restoring the relational integrity of the community, all these aiming at healthy communal living. Thus, saying that justice was then carried out in

due process or by giving each his like in modern justice system is untenable. "While certain religious offenses and crimes against human life required strict retributive punishment, including 'cutting off' and 'death,' even here the goal was the restoration of the community to its covenant commitment to be a holy people" (124).

Even cases of execution of those guilty of certain serious crimes were not like modern ways of responding to antisocial persons but "a kind of communal cleansing or ceremonial expiation of especially serious sins that, if left unchecked, threatened the actual survival of the community as a covenant people" (Marshall 125). Restitution rather than retribution was in order in cases of noncapital offenses. As the basic principle used in case of injury within the community, restitution means "restored *shalom*, which flourishes only when true justice has been done, where harm has been repaired" (125). In such a context, punitive elements may include restituting double or more of what was lost, depending on the seriousness of the offense or on the attitude of the wrongdoer (Exod. 22:1, 4, 7, 9; Lev. 6:5; Prov. 6:30-31). Even in cases where enslavement was required (Exod. 21:1-6; Deut. 15:12-17), it lasted for six years (i.e., until the Year of Jubilee; Lev. 25:39-55). Contrary to what proponents of punishment think, slavery in ancient Israel cannot be likened to modern imprisonment because slavery was a more humane practice (126).

In the Old Testament then, language of divine retribution is also permeated with its counter-theme so that assertion of God's punishment is followed by assertion of his compassion (Amos 1; 5:5; Jer. 30:11, 18). Virginia Mackey arrives at a similar conclusion in her survey of the notion of punishment in the Jewish tradition:

> In their Scripture and tradition, Jews have urged caution in judgment, have shown reluctance to punish, and have exhibited the desire to make

> atonement, restitution, or reconciliation when conflicts have occurred. This is their interpretation of "making right," "making peace," or achieving shalom. The predominant theology is one of restoration. (12)

The most impressive counter-theme is found in the New Testament where the notion of just desserts and repayment in kind is turned on its head (Matt. 5:38-42; 20:1-16; Luke 15:11-32; John 8:7-11; Rom. 4:5; 5:6), pointing thus to the New Testament as the most serious religious body of books aiming at deconstructing the logic of retributivism (127). New Testament texts testify that Jesus did not see the worst condition of humanity, the condition of those comparable to criminals, to be an acceptable and unalterable state of affairs, Jesus did not recommend or tolerate punishment but entered the lawbreaker's life with radical acceptance and unconditional love. His cross and resurrection are a clear demonstration of his saving, loving, and restorative justice (16), which was later practiced by his early followers before the tradition of Westernized Christianity began advocating and encouraging today's retributive justice.

Although Christian theologies have been used to support and develop the current criminal justice system (Snyder 55-72), significant revisionists voices today within the Christian family denouncing societal entrapment to the system (McHugh 86-144; Snyder 1-32; Marshall 145-254; M. Taylor 18-67; Soering 1-7, 125-26). Marshall, though using limited materials, comes to the helpful conclusion that "first Christians experienced in Christ and lived out in their faith communities an understanding of justice as power that heals, restores, and reconciles rather than hurts, punishes, and kills" (33). This reality, he suggests, "ought to shape and direct a Christian contribution to the criminal justice debate today" (33).

In his theological response to punishment, Marshall posits two main criticisms. The first criticism is that retribution operates by taking into account, with regard to the offender, "external actions rather than personal character" (127). External actions only are taken into account because, in human affairs since, a person's true motives are not easily discovered. Insofar as true motives only lead to right actions so that true justice ought to address true motive and provide correction at that level. Furthermore, attempts to discern motives for a particular action cannot be isolated from the person's entire moral history and character. For this reason, listening to offenders' stories, something that the criminal justice system is not structured to do, is necessary. Whereas true justice must normally account for all the factors that pertain to an individual offense, popular criminal justice systems are run in a way that does not seek to explore those factors and respond to them accordingly. Moreover, human beings "can never know all these factors and are simply not equipped to make final judgments on people," however evil their actions may be (127). Therefore, punishment alone cannot be easily justified as an adequate response to antisocial behaviors.

The second theological observation is that punishment as such cannot completely satisfy the requirements of justice because if "[j]ustice is fully satisfied only when the harm caused by wrongdoing is undone, when the damage is repaired, when the bad consequences of wrong actions are cancelled out," then the necessity of looking for other alternatives to punishment is needed because punishment "does none of these things" (Marshall 128). Numerous victims still carry damages and consequences of wrong actions done to them despite serious punishments, including the death penalty, inflicted on their offenders.

The wisdom that guided early Christians regarding dealing with wrongdoing becomes useful at this point. Earliest Christianity, in regard to crime, was characterized by "a spirit of peaceful resignation toward offenses and offenders, as opposed to one of zealous righteousness" (McHugh 15). They were also concerned "with spiritual implication of offenses against the community" and emphasized "reconciliation of offenders with the community and with God" (15). In the medieval period, the loving and conciliatory emphasis that marked the early Christian emphasis on offenses was lost:

> The early Christians' tentative struggling to understand their new faith, plus their willingness to experientially meet the Gospel, allowed for a latitude and humility which was reflected in their merciful ways with offenders. Whereas the medieval Christians' struggling to achieve a near-absolute certainty in faith, coupled with their tendency to approach the Gospel in philosophical and abstract ways, resulted in a rigor and severity which was in turn reflected in their harsh treatment of offenders. (27)

The constant positing of modern legal justice as representative of or inspired by Christian faith disappears in the face of the aforementioned explanation. Other changes that happened include (1) the Church's attempt to establish God's kingdom in the realm of Christendom through the use of force and coercion instead of spiritual persuasion, (2) the Church's depersonalization of the concept of crime shifting thus the focus from restoring interpersonal and spiritual conditions (human) into the restoration of natural order of God's creation or God's law (abstract), and (3) the decline of the spirit of forbearance, which was replaced by the spirit of zealousness that later leads to overt moralism and prosecutor mentality (27-29). Theologically then punishment of criminals, at least in its popular fashion, is untenable.

Therapeutic Treatment of Antisocial Behaviors

This study discusses three main therapeutic responses that experts use to treat those dealing with antisocial behaviors. These approaches are (1) pharmacological treatment, (2) individual and group psychotherapy, and (3) cognitive behavioral therapy. All other existing treatment approaches may prove to be variants of these three.

Given that some have tried to discover biological causes for antisocial behaviors, medical treatments are made available to this effect; hence, experts believe that lithium carbonate and carbamazepine are associated with decreased generic violence, aggression, and impulsiveness (Reid and Gacono 848). A 1997 study discovered that phenytoin is associated with the reduction of impulsive aggression (848). Jessica H. Lee accounts for neuroleptic, antidepressants, lithium, benzodiazepines, psychostimulants, and anticonvulasants as medicines aiming at having controlling effects on human antisocial behaviors (10-11). Experts have proven also that medication can be accompanied with nonmedical treatment to provide effective results in many cases. Despite all these available medical options one must heed the warning according to which "[n]o controlled study suggests that medication improves antisocial character *per se*" (Quinsey, Harris, Rice, and Cormier 654). Moreover, T. S. Szasz worried that while the norm from which many deviations are measured is *psychological and ethical*, "the remedy is sought in terms of *medical* [original emphasis] measures which—it is hoped and assumed—are free from wide differences and ethical value" (71). "The definition of the disorder," he adds, "and the terms in which its remedy are sought are therefore at serious odds with one another" (71). The extent to which medical treatment is helpful for antisocial behaviors is very questionable.

Clinicians who explain antisocial behaviors from a psychodynamic perspective are likely to use individual and group therapy approaches to respond to the issue. Psychodynamic psychotherapy, originating from Sigmund Freud's work, and the resulting principles of psychoanalysis allow those who use this theory to approach patients with empathy and seek to help identify and understand happenings in their inner world. A therapeutic intervention in the light of this theory is done with regard to background, upbringing, and personal development (Lee 13). As far as personality problems are concerned, this approach holds that the consolidation of a normal system of internalized morals and values leads to an integrated self and protects normal personal identity. For this reason, the goal of this approach is "to modify personality organization and the quality of the internal object relations associated with symptoms and pathological character traits" (Kernberg and Caligor 143). To achieve this goal, clinicians using this approach explore patients' internal object relations as they are played out in their current relationships. This exploration is done based primarily on the nature of the patients' current relationship with clinicians. This relationship is intended to help uncover clients' mental states and meanings behind their behaviors so as to allow them to understand their feelings and maladaptive defense mechanisms (Lee 13). Clinicians are expected to recognize similarities and patterns between clients' recall of memories and current relationships and, in turn, share with them the meaning of these remembrances. J. S. Maxmen and N. G. Ward are rather pessimistic about obtaining any change from psychotherapy for those with ASPD (406). According to them, persons with ASPD have no desire to change, consider insights into their past as excuses, have no concept for the future, resent all authorities, view the patient role as pitiful, detest their inferiority

position, and view therapy as a joke and therapists as objects to play with, seduce, threaten, and use. Another evaluative warning is also helpful:

> There are no styles of individual psychotherapies that are routinely associated with successful treatment of antisocial syndromes. Analytic therapies that affect character structure are theoretically useful, but the patients' lack of discomfort with their disorder, their virtually universal intolerance for the anxiety necessary to benefit from intensive work, and the ease with which they can escape treatment ... all work against probability of success. (Quinsey, Harris, Rice, and Cormier 852)

David Lester and Patricia Von Voorhis also agree that although its insights are helpful for other purposes, "psychoanalysis is not a practical alternative for most criminals or delinquents" (125).

Group therapy is a coordinated gathering between those dealing with identical problems and those who are in treatment with a clinician. Basically the difference between group therapy and individual therapy is the presence of other clients in the session. The group's goal is to educate, encourage, and support its members. It also provides a secure setting where information can be shared and opinions heard without fear of being reproved or corrected. Methods used to conduct group therapy are Eric Berne's transactional analysis, J. L. Moreno's psychodrama, Maxwell Jone's milieu therapy, and William Glasser's reality therapy (Van Voorhis, Braswell, and Lester 196-215). Psychodrama remains the one mostly used by specialists and consists in having clients act out and experience various aspects of their life situations in front of an audience made up of other clients (actors) and counselors (201). This approach is "used to help patients work through a block in expression or communication, or to explore a key conflict in their lives" (Lee 14). This goal is achieved through creating a catharsis or emotional purging and insight (Van Voorhis, Braswell, and Lester 201). However, group

therapy can be conducted with any number of theoretical therapeutic frameworks. All approaches have limitations because in practice group therapy has generally become oppressive. It usually leads counselors to force people (clients) to conform to goals and ideals that are imposed upon them so that while experts call group work reeducation, the clients involved see it as brainwashing (223).

A cognitive approach to treating personality problems attempts to reach specific and varying goals with each client. With very focused interventions, cognitive therapy generally aims at "achieving alleviation of the client's distress as efficiently as is feasible and also achieving whatever changes are necessary for the improvement to persist over time and for the client to lead a happy, productive life" (Pretzer and Beck 74). Personality restructuring is not the goal of cognitive therapy for personality disorders; rather, it aims at alleviating clients' distress, improving their daily functioning, thus mediating the lasting changes needed to maintain the achieved improvements. Limited also by policies of health insurance coverage, particular agencies' rules, and clients' level of motivation, cognitive therapy's goals become even more limited than is expected. Generally, the practice of cognitive therapy helps identify "the specific dysfunctional beliefs that play a role in the individual's problems and examining them critically while correcting for the effect of selective perception, biased cognition, and cognitive distortions and helping the individual to face and tolerate adverse affect" (75). Cognitive therapy holds that changing individuals' dysfunctional behaviors requires modifying long-held cognitions and examines individuals' expectations of their actions. Successful change also demands modification of clients' environment, and help them as individuals, master the cognitive and behavioral skills needed to engage successfully in more adaptive behaviors (76). To

this end, therapists are expected to work with clients in a process of recognizing of contributing factors and of testing the validity of their beliefs, thoughts, and assumptions. In the process, clients will make needed changes in cognition and behaviors.

This approach has proven to bring improvement to clients who have been diagnosed both with major depression and antisocial personalities. Subjects who have been singly diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder with no major depression accompanying it have shown little to no improvement. In some cases they got worse (Prezter and Beck 99-100). In 1998 W. H. Reid and C. Gacono demonstrated that antisocial persons can benefit from modified psychodynamic approaches that use cognitive-behavioral techniques (653). Although they note that Davidson and Tyrer found some changes in dysfunctional behavior and attitude with this method, these changes were not statistically significant (653). Reid and Gacono maintain that a combination of specifically defined cognitive and behavioral approaches such as rational behavior training, "criminal lifestyle," and relapse prevention may hold limited promise for some antisocial personality disorders (653).

Behavior therapy, specifically, works on modifying patients' behaviors based on learning theory and experimental psychology. It views patients' antisocial behaviors as having been acquired by learning or improper conditioning, as "the inevitable result of an interaction between environmental history and current environmental situation" rather than as spiritual or mental processes (Lee 12). Behavior therapy holds that those acquired behaviors, except the ones related to organic problems, are amenable to empirical prediction and control. Reid and Gacono favor more the behavioral approach:

> [P]rograms that remove patients ... from their usual environments and place them in controlled, inflexible settings that reward productive

> behavior and unequivocally punish non-compliance have a good record of success with antisocial and dissocial youth, and fair success with some kinds of violent perpetrators. (653)

Lee also reports several success stories regarding the use of cognitive and behavioral techniques but points to the fact that "most programs target specific behavioural deficits ... and very rarely address the treatment of psychological disorders in their entirety" (20). Also, the concept of "improvement" in certain skills is vague among practitioners, as no standard exists by which to measure or define what improvement represents. Moreover, one difficulty relates to the fact that this technique is applied in institutional settings, thus conditioning patients to certain behaviors within those settings. These behaviors acquired often turn out to be difficult to repeat or perform once patients leave the setting where they acquire them in order to live in noninstitutional settings.

Therapy and Ministry in the Criminal Justice Arena

A current growing and maturing approach to the issue of antisocial behaviors is the blending of correction and counseling together. Experts believe that the approach focusing on the quality of relationship processes between staff and offenders can be used both in institutional and community settings:

> [T]his approach suggests that the qualities of the relationship process, itself, are at the center of positive or destructive decisionmaking; that the inner work of an offender or counselor's relationship needs to take priority in order that external expressions in the context of family and work can be positive and sustaining. (Braswell, "Correctional Treatment" 7)

The approach herein described suggests a focus on good relationships in the institutional setting between persons with antisocial behaviors and those offering them treatment. This can be at odds with nontherapeutic or punitive treatment and with clinical intervention preoccupied with prescribing quick fixes.

The acceptable view of correctional counselors is to see them as helping professionals who, applying their skills and expertise in correctional and related milieus, aim at intervening therapeutically with various clients, the majority of whom are offenders (Braswell, "Purpose" 25). The effectiveness of correctional counseling is difficult to evaluate because experts do not agree as to what effectiveness represents. The evaluation depends on whether one sees effectiveness as keeping prisons' routines running smoothly with little regard for impacting the offenders to return and readjust to the community or whether effectiveness means being able to implement the cheapest program (35-36). When effectiveness is seen from the lens of the desired goal of the present work, that is reconstructing and freeing antisocial persons for communal living, claiming effectiveness of correctional therapy becomes almost impossible due to a number of factors such as the need for criminal justice professionals and counselors to maintain the status quo in order to keep their jobs (36-37).

Whereas some studies prove the effectiveness of treatment when the leverage of the criminal justice system is used to maintain offenders in treatment (Egbert, Church, and Byrnes 77, 87, 89), Paul A. Jones says that counseling or rehabilitation of offenders is ineffective and, therefore, must be opposed. He sees programs such as "educational programs, counseling programs, and many other things" as "totally ineffective as far as changing any inmates for the better" (6). Consequently, he suggests that sociopaths be sentenced to life imprisonment and those who try to do them good be kept away, and children living in potentially dangerous homes be taken away, and sociopaths be sterilized and prevented from adopting (41).

Brian Williams argues that the role of counseling in criminal justice is largely marginal due to several reasons, such as lack of resources to meet clients' needs, conflict between aims of punishment and counseling, and the inability for offenders to share their counseling needs to correctional staff (including correctional counselors) whom they perceive in a disciplinary role rather than in a helping role (31-32). Successful counseling depends upon a trusting relationship, which is likely to be jeopardized by the aggressive style of discussion sometimes involved in confronting offenders about their behaviors in criminal justice settings. In such cases a genuine consultation between a counselor and a client is even more critical because the confrontational environment alters their relationship. Envisaging potentially constructive outcomes from such a contract between client and counselor is almost impossible (77-78). Nevertheless, the doubt expressed here does not signify a discounting of normal confrontation in counseling relationships. Williams expresses the difference:

> It is possible—and advisable—to be direct in discussing offending with clients, but there is no need to be aggressive. In counselors' use of the idea of confrontation, this distinction is clearly made: "confrontation does not mean opposing the client but pointing out discrepancies between clients' goals and their actions. ..." This is confrontation in the sense of encouraging clients to consider the logic—or the lack of it—in their thinking and their actions. In other words, it is confronting people with inconsistencies in their accounts and behaviour. (78-79)

Williams does a great service in helping see that counseling confrontation and security forces' confrontation have different goals and means and thus stand several miles apart.

Several people rightly question whether counseling, in its popular form, is not a humane face of an unjust and oppressive system or even part of the overall problem that causes more antisocial problems. In response to these concerns, Williams argues that counseling has an important role to play as far as "it changes in response to the demands

and opportunities created by practice in criminal justice settings" (124). If not, "it may come to be seen as irrelevant to the real problems facing criminal justice systems around the world" (124). The change of approach in counseling persons with antisocial behaviors is necessary because "counselling does not exist outside of society, and counselling agencies sometimes have to engage with their social context" (15). Most clinicians, however, do not engage in counseling individuals with the goal of engaging the social context of those they aim to treat.

Williams is on target when he argues that treatment of offenders must be carried out holistically (i.e., by aiming at changing not only offenders but also the victims and the criminal justice systems; 4). The change of criminal justice systems will ultimately lead to the inclusion of such agencies that are not, because of their radicalism or indirect link with the court or police, considered in discussions of criminal justice and counseling. Among those agencies are church ministries. Williams is also helpful in his assessment of the importance for individual and group counseling to go hand in hand in correctional counseling due the importance of the social and structural nature of individuals' problems (4).

The Christian approach to collaboration with the criminal justice system is usually called prison ministry and is championed by the evangelical ministry called Prison Fellowship International, which has national prison fellowships around the world. Other ministries include Alpha prison ministry, International Prison Chaplains' Association, and Kairos Prison Ministry International. Such parachurch oprganizations are doing important services for many involved in the prison system as offenders. However,

phenomenological observations are showing limitations pertaining to Christian ministry behind the bars that are similar to those described for counseling in criminal justice.

Mark Earley makes the finest observation to this effect: "When Chuck Colson founded Prison Fellowship in the mid-70s there were a quarter of a million people in prisons in the United States. Today [November 2006] that figure is 2.3 millions. There's been a ten-fold increase over the last 30 years in the prison population" (qtd. in Moll 70). This sad observation, while Earley did not link it to an evaluation of PFI, suits well such evaluation because one can ask whether PFI has been really mobilizing the church in order to respond to the phenomenon. He probably points to one limitation when he says that after years of experiences, PFI workers have now learned that the idea that prison ministry is what goes on in prison is no longer tenable:

> What we're finding is that if we want to see God continue to raise up men and women from within prison, see them come to Christ, make lifestyle changes, and be fruitful for the rest of their lives after they get out of prison, some of the most critical ministry occurs when they leave the prison gate. (74)

Whereas PFI has formerly put too much emphasis on converting people behind the bars, they are yet to broaden their horizon and put more emphasis on life beyond the bars.

Another consequence of this understanding is a new sense of passion for restorative justice as expressed by PFI founder Charles Colson (121-59) and the whole organization, which now has a restorative justice center. Ultimately, then, lasting reconstructive justice happens beyond the confines of the failing criminal justice. Without such complements and those pertaining to building a better and righteous society into which ex-prisoners must live, Christian ministry behind the bars may be worthless without serious long-term impact on those receiving ministry. Perhaps Jones is right in

his assessment of an unsuccessful Christian prison ministry, among unsuccessful rehabilitative attempts. The weeklong program at the prison consisted of preaching services, testimonials, athletic events, visitations with the inmates, and a variety of other things. Several men from local churches would visit the inmates cell to cell as a follow-up. As a result of that program, Jones observes, "Only one inmate in the entire prison was converted, but he actually was already a believer who had just 'backslidden.' He only reaffirmed or rededicated himself" (15). In his analysis on these programs he concludes that bringing the Christian message to the inmates in an attempt at converting them turned out to be a gimmick. He observes that some volunteers acted as though whether or not inmates convert did not matter. Rather, what is important is that the staff gets money from churches and others to support the program of taking the message to prisons. Hence, successful prison ministries are sadly measured based on the amount of money raised to keep the crusade going, to pay the salaries and expenses of those involved, but not necessarily on converting inmates (15-16). PFI ministry is not immune from such temptations.

Toward a Better Approach for Urban Churches in Bénin

Thus far this work has discussed the limitations of the most popular responses to antisocial behaviors and has pointed out their common weaknesses. The following lines are an exploration of key elements that can be part of a whole system designed to respond better to the phenomenon of antisocial behaviors in Bénin.

Therapeutic community. Maxwell Jones reacted to the authoritarian or custodial approaches to patient care prevalent in the 1940s. All previously mentioned approaches are to be regarded as such, authoritarian/custodial because they all place the therapist or

the justice officer in a position of an expert who, skilled within a given theoretical approach, provides an appropriate therapy. Instead of situating the healing within the therapeutic relationship between the expert and the patient, as the dominant theories assume, Jones recognizes that "the milieu could serve as a healing force in the treatment of psychiatric patients" (qtd. in Hansen and Slevin 673). For this reason, he sought to establish what he calls a therapeutic community, "which emphasized open communication, patient involvement in treatment planning and decision making, and open discussion of interpersonal conflicts" (673). According to R. Rapoport, this approach discouraged psychotherapy to patients and encouraged, in addition to psychopharmacological treatment, a sort of life together among patients marked by democratization (patient involvement), permissiveness (tolerance of abnormal behavior, awareness of abnormal behavior, and open discussion about it), and communalism (patients live in an atmosphere where they can express their feelings and work out their problems openly).

J. T. Hansen and C. Slevin demonstrate that the introduction of therapeutic community principles is successful in bringing about positive therapeutic benefits to a contemporary acute care psychiatric unit. They initiate a staff-training program prior to introducing therapeutic community principles, making the noncommunity-oriented psychiatric training problematic for a successful treatment. The strength of this approach can be located in their basic assumption, which is that "the delegation of responsibility to residents in a 'living and learning' environment will encourage a more open expression of feelings among patients and a greater understanding and exploration of interpersonal relationships" (Lee 14). When staff-patient hierarchical relationship is relaxed in favor of

collaboration between them instead, "all interactions and relationships in the community can come under examination" (21) leading "to a better understanding of deviant or unhealthy previous behaviour, which may then result in altered interpersonal behaviour and improved psychosocial functioning" (22-23).

The therapeutic community approach is a great paradigm shift because it locates the healing, not in the individual only, but in the patients to patients and staff to patients relationships. What the approach does not say, however, which can be deduced, is that a patient's sickness cannot be solely located in the patient alone. If healing comes through some sort of healthy relationship or community life, then sickness must be seen as coming from unhealthy community life or relationship. This approach is more than welcome in a context such as Bénin, where, as in most parts of Africa, community life is central for the well-being of the individual. One weakness of this theory, however, is that it has an optimistic view of the community of the sick themselves as an avenue of healing. The sick must absolutely be healed in community, but that such a community can only be made up of other sick persons is not adequate. For this reason, emphasis must be placed on other community-oriented approaches.

Society Conscious Interventions. This section is about interventions that attempt to resolve patients' issues by targeting their social network beginning with their parents, particularly when antisocial patients are adolescents. By targeting parents these interventions work on parental practices, that is, they help parents manage their children more effectively. These programs also include a training component designed to help antisocial persons communicate better with their parents and peers (Patterson, Reid, and Dishion 15-30). The challenge with this perspective is to be overtly focused on parental

training and in the process neglect the change needed at the level of the antisocial person. An exclusive focus on parent training is only marginally effective in changing antisocial behaviors due to the influence of deviant peer groups and the use of drugs with peers (Keiley 447-80). Even in case attention is paid to offer a balanced focus on both the antisocial persons and their parents for treatment, results have also been less than desired.

P. B. Cunningham and S. W. Henggeler suggest that parents' high dropout from the treatment process is the major cause for this poor result. They also suggest that parental dropouts are due to the fact that parents have to deal with several negative life events such as unemployment, lack of community resources, high levels of neighborhood violence, and poor school systems (265-66, 279-81). In consequence, the symptoms and the maintenance of antisocial behaviors are multidimensional, blending personal and family characteristics, as well as societal forces at work. For these reasons proper interventions must target not only individuals or family (plus individuals) but also the social forces or constraints as well.

Several specialists have noticed the insufficiency of treatment programs that focus on changing individuals' behaviors. Along this line, W. M. Reinke and K. C. Herman in their discussion on effective methods to responding to antisocial behaviors in children suggest that "[p]rograms that focus independently on the child are not as effective as those that simultaneously 'educate' the child and instill positive changes across both the schools and the home environments" (556). Viewing antisocial behavioral change in a larger ecological framework, they agree that treatment programs must address the teachers' and families' behaviors, the relationship between the home and the school, and

the needs of the school and neighborhood to support healthy norms and competent behaviors:

> When we hear harrowing stories of school violence, our immediate response is to demonize the children who commit such acts, or their parents. Solutions that arise from this mindset are usually shortsighted and uncreative. To solve difficult problems such as those presented by school violence, we need a sophisticated understanding of the multiple influences that contribute to child aggression. (557)

The above statement is a sharp criticism of standardized reaction to antisocial persons, and such a criticism is very useful. Therefore, no longer should interventions target only individuals or individuals plus their families alone. Beyond these arenas, interventions must seek to respond to unfavorable external systems and structures, such as schools and social services. Such interventions call for an explicit address of the issue of social justice in society "to include economic, social and political equality, between and among individuals and groups, as well as within and between institutions" (Birkenmaier 43). The aim of social justice would be to see that basic human needs (i.e., material, social-psychological, productive-creative, security, self-actualization and spiritual) are met, institutions are working for the common good, and people in society are able to work and be productive in a wholistic manner. The advent of social justice will be possible not only through implementing social justice activities now but also through educating future generations for the continuity of such undertakings (46-49). Thus, individual psychological issues will always be considered in the framework of political and socioeconomic forces impinging upon individuals. The following point is an important aspect of engaging society for the purpose of responding to antisocial behaviors.

Disbelieving law enforcers and engaging organized gang groups. Based on the widely shared view that certain persons are just criminals to the core and almost unchangeable,

many people have allowed such criminals to live in society as such. Hence, several spots have organized gang groups where members are left to themselves to live as professional delinquents. To this effect, society expects professional police officers to offer protection in order to avert the course of actions of those gangs. In Bénin, security agents utilize such an approach, including during special occasions such as Christmas and New Year feasts, where crime activities are expected to rise. The modern arrangement, which leaves people's security and peace in the hands of professional police persons, has not always been the case. Former Chief Justice of the West Virginia supreme court Richard Neely elaborates:

> It is widely thought that modern society made a conscious decision that the civil rights and civil liberties of citizens would be best protected if only professional police had law enforcement powers.... Indeed, it was cupidity, pusillanimity and sloth—not idealism—that led us to entrust our safety to professional police officers.... [W]e delegated law enforcement duties because the average citizen is too busy, too lazy, too indifferent and often too frightened to do the necessary policing himself. (30-31)

Neely suggests here that citizens themselves are able to do something for to protect their rights and liberties that are endangered by antisocial persons instead of leaving all the responsibility to professional police. He further provides a historical case for the unnecessary confidence modern-day persons have put in law enforcers:

> [A] professional police force with a near-monopoly of enforcement powers has not always been thought to be a necessary adjunct to civil rights and civil liberties. In fact, throughout most of the Anglo-American legal history, quite the opposite was the prevailing concept. The English declare to this day that a police officer is someone who is paid to do what it is a citizen's duty to do without pay. (39-40)

Based on the above sense of historical common citizens' responsibility, Neely is committed to "demonstrating why the police cannot do for us what we can do for

ourselves, and how we can get serious about protecting ourselves and our loved ones" (77).

Neely asserts that the inefficiency of the judiciary is due, not to the quality of charging criminals, but to the fact that courts are not just criminal courts; courts that process criminal cases are almost always civil courts as well (88). Through this assertion, he means that not only criminal cases are treated at the court but also civil cases, such as automobile accidents and billions product-liability cases. Because courts are generally filled with all these types of cases, they are often "clogged, overburdened, complex, expensive and incompetent" (88), allowing for no reasonable judiciary ruling to emerge "in any reasonable time" (88). For this reason, in stark opposition to the later turning of security to professional police and judges, it is time, Neely maintains, to turn to the community itself as it has always been before modern time. He shows pessimism that getting more police in the society will necessarily leads to more patrolling:

> No matter how many policemen are available, there will always be more calls than any reactive model can handle, which means that the average cop will still spend only 2 percent of his time patrolling.... Most of us stopped calling the police for anything less serious than a rape in progress or burglar entering our basement window. The reason is that when we do call the police, there is little they can do that is useful, or they come so late that there is nothing they can do. Often, indeed, if the police come in time, they are so unhelpful that we wish we hadn't called them in the first place! Yet as soon as there are more officers, there will be more calls: Police officers are a "public good" that is offered free of charge to all citizens on an even-handed basis. Because there is no fixed price for this good, the demand always exceeds the supply. (99)

This analysis is real and contemporary professional police works only confirm it due to their widely acknowledged inefficiency. For this reason, Neely's call for volunteer community security patrols is a welcome admonition. This is not because "community enforcement is the *best* [original emphasis] alternative for controlling crime; rather, it is

that community enforcement is the *only* [emphasis original] alternative for controlling crime" (105).

Returning the seeking of peace and security to the community itself is thus a noble task that Christian congregations can engage in given their calling. To this effect, Neely does well by mentioning churches among local organizations that can perform important functions in people's lives (140). The essential of urban churches' responsibility regarding engaging dangerous persons in society will be a missional engagement with existing gang associations.

The reality of organized groups performing antisocial behaviors is a well-known phenomenon in both Cotonou and Porto-Novo. Those groups are so notorious that they gain wealthy persons' attention, some who contract with them and give them money in order to live in peace. Organized in a structured society of their own, gangs generally become almost difficult to approach, let alone to visit and befriend them. However, Irving Spergel dispels the myth of inapproachability by describing the internal communal lives of such organized persons in terms of subcultures, groups, and individuals (1-19). Spergel's study, although focused specific to gangs' activities in the U. S., is helpful and presents the readers with the possibility of meaningful and transformative engagement with such groups. He calls such an engagement of *street work* because most gangs either hang around streets or disturb people alongside streets. Spergel defines street work as follows:

> [A] systematic effort by an agency worker to help a group of young people, described as delinquent or potentially delinquent, to achieve a conventional adaptation through use of social work or social treatment techniques within distinctive neighborhood contexts. Street work further requires worth with, or manipulation of, those persons or agency

> representatives who interact critically with the members of delinquent groups. (44)

This perspective bears a hopeful attitude toward those usually seen to be uncontrollable in society. For this reason, not everyone can engage in such kind of work.

Apart from professional or academic qualifications, the street worker must be someone who knows the reason for being on the street and what is expected as actions toward gangs groups and their members (45). Given that the purposes of street work include "control, treatment, provision of access to opportunities, value change, and the prevention of delinquent behaviors," the ideal street worker has the following characteristics:

> [N]atural facility in relating to adolescents, is deeply concerned about the welfare of young people, especially in lower class communities, and is prepared by training.... Of key importance is the worker's understanding of neighborhood social, cultural, and economic conditions, or the context within which delinquent group behavior is created and can be identified. (45)

These points make up important qualities that church members intend to engage in battling antisocial behaviors must cultivate.

Spergel suggests three strategies for engaging organized gangs, namely, case work, group work, and community organizations. Through case-work strategy, a counselor focuses on an individual from within a gang group in order to resolve problems of dependence-independence and authority (46). In case work, individuals are helped to examine motivations behind their behaviors and the implications of these latter. They are also led to better interact with parents, employers, and teachers, all significant persons in their lives, in order to improve their interactions with the individual in treatment (46). Through group work, the street worker is concerned with modifying members' antisocial

behaviors through modifying group structure and processes. In the process, the street will be led to reshape hang groups' goal, norms, sanctions, leadership, and program activities with the cooperation of group members (46). He or she must approach the gang group as one seeking their best and not as a treat or police informant. Community organizations consist in working through existing organization in order to influence adult groups and pertinent organizational structures (45). The street worker then attempts to increase available community resources to the benefits of gang group members (46). As such the street worker works for a better coordination of available resources or advocate for the releasing of resources in favor of those that are disadvantaged.

One obvious weakness of Spergel's approach is its focus on the capability of the street worker to focus on the group members and their environment for behavioral change. This is insufficient based on Christian faith which accords an indisputable place to divine involvement in the process of moral transformation. However, Spergel provides a challenge that most Christians can find at odd with their social location amidst antisocial behaviors. That challenge is the call to engage the scary world of organized gang groups.

Cultural resiliencies awareness interventions. Before advocating for cultural strengths and resiliencies, discussing how "culture" has been used negatively in the mental health field is important. Many have sought to associate a racial explanation to some psychopathologies, including ASPD and antisocial behaviors; hence, some authors explain that many social problems, specifically those related to black social problems including antisocial behaviors, emanate from within the black community itself (Patterson 250-55). Y. A. Payne and R. L. Taylor, based on empirical data, portray black

youth or blacks, in particular, with negative psychological traits such as low achievement motivation, estrangement from schooling and formal learning activities, negative self-concept and negative self-esteem, and strong propensities to delinquency and violence (Payne 109-10, 121-22; Taylor 15-35). They highlight the fact that these negative psychological traits found in black males are the result of their coming from naturally broken and unstable families. Others demonstrate that blacks easily get involved in crime, drug use, and drug trafficking because they are genetically predisposed (Duster 132-35) or culturally primed (Payne 120-22) to do so. Hence, many scholars, even some from black scholarly families, have attempted to demonstrate that contemporary problems such ASPD and antisocial behaviors in the black community can be traced in a linear fashion to the legacy of slavery and past discrimination. They estimate that these past events happened without anything affording an opportunity to black communities to right themselves psychologically or culturally.

W E. Cross, Jr. constructs a helpful counter history showing the previous arguments as dubious, problematic, and unconvincing. In a uniquely convincing manner, he discusses that efforts to dwell on the past events underestimate contemporary systemic causal factors. Turning against the slavery thesis, he sees all the popular causal factors as myths about black history and culture, myths that become another form of violence directed toward black culture and black people as a whole (69). Instead of viewing black culture as historically determined to promote violence or pathogenetically flawed, Cross depicts a positive black-achieving culture with a tendency toward excellence and high standards. These qualities, he believes, have been discouraged and opposed by the white hegemony through segregated school systems, discriminating employment measures, and

racialization of drug use and imprisonment practices. He believes that "Blacks exited slavery with the type of social capital, family attitudes, and positive achievement motivation that could have readily facilitated their rapid acculturation into the mainstream of American society, had society wanted them" (80). Their antisocial behaviors or personalities, far from being caused by their biological defect or cultural nature, have "been the result of key structural and institutional problems over which Blacks had little control" (77).

Stereotypes created through misinterpreting minority cultures concerning mental disorders are so prevalent that the DSM personality disorders criteria "include characteristics that some ethnic groups perceive as culturally appropriate and not pathological" (Iwamasa, Larabee, and Merritt 292). Given the fact that some minority mental health professionals have negative experiences with their nonminority mental health colleagues, and the fact that a client's race influences diagnostic judgment of clinician, non-minority clinicians may well mishandle minority clients (Cross 292). People from cultures that are categorized as inherently aggressive are then in jeopardy of being labeled antisocial with no cure seeing that the treatments offered by clinicians have little to offer in terms healing from ASPD or antisocial behaviors. Given this state of things, an appropriate culturally relevant response to antisocial behaviors will, first, become free from the cultural biases and, second, try to approach people's cultures so as to find resiliencies or strengths in indigenous practices in order to foster the healing process through them. This approach is consonant with a theological commitment to the prevenient nature of God's healing grace in all peoples or cultures.

As a way to show the value of minority social capital and cultural resiliency, A. Y. Zhang and L. S. Snowden report from their study on ethnic characteristics and mental disorders that blacks and Asians were significantly less likely than whites to have a number of psychological disorders, including antisocial personalities (144-46). The significance of this conclusion is that when minority cultures function well the possibility of people becoming antisocial is feeble. One basic explanation for this is the fact that most minorities' values and principles are able to keep them from such disorders. To this effect, A. R. Harvey discusses the District of Columbia-based MAAT (Maat is an Egyptian name meaning living a virtuous and moral life) program, which offers social and psychological services for high-risk African-American adolescent males and their families based on an Afrocentric approach. Incorporating African indigenous principles of spirituality and collectivity, that program develops and implements a rites of passage to serve adolescent African-American males at risk for exhibiting delinquent behaviors and their families.

The MAAT program, grounded in an Afrocentric worldview, teaches African-American males and their families how to build character, self-esteem, and unity. It includes in-home family therapy and individual adolescent counseling, adolescent after-school groups, and family enhancement and empowerment interventions. Many participants in this program (with backgrounds of abuse and neglect, mental health problems, antisocial behaviors) are referred by the local juvenile court system and mental health agencies. From that kind of program many adolescents learn life skills that they are able to use as long-term behaviors to avoid the juvenile justice system and to maintain themselves as productive members of their families, communities, and society.

R. C. Cervantes, K. Ruan, and N. Duenas discuss the Orange County-based Programata Shortstop, another culturally sensitive program reaching Hispanic juvenile delinquents. Similar to the MAAT program, Programa Shortsop builds on a previously unsuccessful program called Scared Straight by adding to it parents' involvement, peer-led reality testing and confrontation, legal education, and life skills education in a culturally focused intervention. Given the success rate of Programa Shortstop, Cervantes, Ruan, and Duanes conclude, "[C]ulturally sensitive strategies for Hispanic youth ... may have some effect on reducing delinquent behavior and increasing school related resiliency factors and social skills" (402). This discussion takes into account the value of cultural resiliencies as practitioners engage the world of antisocial persons. Instead of looking for all the help to come from imported theories and techniques, the necessity of going back into indigenous tradition and learn critically the existing resiliencies and what they can provide regarding the matter of social healing from antisocial behaviors. The search for resiliencies is not the only reason for being culturally sensitive, however, because not all elements in cultures are good for healing. People's cultures are embedded within them deeply so that not taking into account cultural elements that do not favor healing may even hinder the process of reconstruction, therefore, engaging indigenous cultures in order to discern possible cultural roadblocks that may counter the goal of healing is of great importance.

Restorative justice intervention. Dissatisfaction with criminal justice and other rehabilitative programs has existed for sometime. The restorative justice movement is the most organized and comprehensive critique offered in replacement of or in complement to the common responses discussed previously. As a movement, restorative justice started

in the 1970s from within the Mennonite Church circles' practice of reconciliation. It was popularized in the Unites States through Howard Zehr, the most important visionary and architect of the movement. His classic book *Changing Lenses* provides the conceptual framework for the movement and continues to influence practitioners and policy makers around the world. A concise definition of the concept is found in *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*:

> Restorative justice is a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible. (37)

The fundamental criticism restorative justice offers criminal justice is that it sees the state as the victim of an offense and subsequently makes impersonal states own the conflict and determine how to respond to it. This undesired approach to justice results in making the process entirely offender driven with little concern for the victim and for other real persons impacted by the crime.

In contrast to this way of handling antisocial behaviors, restorative justice is offer a better alternative:

> [Restorative Justice is] grounded in the belief that those most affected by crime should have the opportunity to become actively involved in resolving conflict. Repairing harm and restoring losses, allowing offenders to take direct responsibility for their actions, and assisting victims to move beyond vulnerability towards some degree of closure stand in sharp contrast to the values and practices of the conventional criminal justice with its focus on past criminal behavior through ever-increasing levels of punishment. (Umbreit et al. 255)

Thus restorative justice (RJ) constitutes a paradigm shift, "an entirely different way of understanding and responding to crime and conflict" able to offer "a far more accountable, understandable, and healing system of justice and law" (300). Zehr rightly

believes that restorative justice's values, practices, and principles go back not only to early British and American ways of handling crime but also to numerous indigenous cultures around the world including African tribal councils (*Little Book* 19-20). Jean E. Greenwood summarizes RJ's key principles:

> Crime harms other human beings, the community as well as the state. In dealing with crime therefore, we must address the human dimensions by involving, if they are willing, victims, offenders, and community members.
> All parties are offered support and treated with respect.
> The goal is to repair the harm done as much as possible and restore individuals and communities to an optimal sense of wholeness.
> Offenders are invited to assume responsibility for their behavior and take action to repair harm.
> Opportunities are offered for direct or indirect dialogue between the parties.
> All are encouraged to express themselves, to describe their experiences and their feelings, to discuss the impact of the crime, and to work together toward agreements that repair harm and bring closure to the experience. (3)

Restorative justice is proving to be a great alternative or complement to the failing criminal justice system around the world to the extent that some law and criminology teachers are teaching and practicing it in their curriculum (Geske 328, 333-34). Mark S. Umbreit et al. account for several systemic changes in the penal systems such departments of corrections as Minnesota, Washington County court, and New Zealand's youth justice system court (267-68). Umbreit et al. describe four types of restorative justice most likely to be found in the field these days; namely, victim-offender mediation, group conferencing, circles, and "other" (269). Victim-offender mediation (also known as victim-offender conferencing, or victim-offender reconciliation program or victim-offender dialogue) gathers victims and offenders in direct mediation facilitated by one or two mediators; thus, the dialogue may take place through a third party who will carry

information back and forth. The victim-offender reconciliation program (VORP) has proven to be a program that can work both independently outside of the criminal justice system and also alongside it. The program consists of a face-to-face meeting between victim and offender in cases when the offender has admitted an offense (through or without the justice system); it emphasizes facts, feelings, and agreements about the offense and is conducted by a trained mediator who is a community volunteer (*Changing Lenses* 160-61). In addition to the mediation time, other face-to-face meetings that support persons such as parents or friends (for both victims and offenders) attend to the need for healing beyond victims and offenders.

Group conferencing (also known as family group conferencing, or community group conferencing, or restorative group conferencing) involves support persons from both sides as well as additional persons from the community who are affected one way or another and/or who will be instrumental in the communal healing process. While some group conferencing can be as small as six or fewer, others can be quite large. Circles (also known as peacemaking circles, or restorative justice circles, or repair of harm circles "or "sentencing circles") are similar to group conferencing but can involve wider members of the community participants such as interested persons, additional circle-keepers, or facilitators. The process involves the use of a "talking piece" passed around to allow participants to intervene one after another. "Others" indicate programs such as reparative boards and other local avenues that offer opportunities to victims and offenders to work together on responding to the wrong that has been done.

The most widely practiced form is RJ dialogue, which also encompasses elements of the other categories. RJ can be practiced as an alternative way of handling crime or as

a component within the traditional criminal justice sentencing process. When it is part of this process, RJ can happen before the criminal justice sentencing. Michael M. O'Hear summarizes the essential features of RJ when it is viewed as part of the sentencing process:

> 1) the offender meets face-to-face with the victim, representatives of the victim, and/or representatives of the community; 2) the meeting involved a facilitated dialogue in which all participants are given an opportunity to share their views of the offense and its consequences; 3) participants seek consensus as to appropriate restorative measures to repair harm caused by the offense, which might include apology, restitution, and community service, in addition to (or in lieu of) more traditional penal sanctions; and 4) mechanisms are put into place to ensure the offender's accountability in performing agreed upon restorative measures. The RJ occurs prior to judicial sentencing. If the dialogue is unsuccessful, or if the offender chooses not to participate, then the offender might be sentenced in the conventional manner. If the dialogue produces an agreement, then the agreement might take the place of a formal judgment or, alternatively, be embodied in the terms of the formal judgment, possibly along with additional judicially-determined sanctions or condition. (307)

Skeptic of the usefulness of RJ posits the lack of uniformity, a concept dear to conventional sentencing, as sufficient reason to reject its practice (304-05). Though the concept has some dynamics, it generally addresses the issue of proportionality, meaning "that similarly situated offenders are sentenced similarly, while different offenders are sentenced appropriately differently" (306). In his critical analysis of this situation, O'Hear rebukes this criticism:

> [R]etributive proportionality cannot truly accomplish what it sets out to do without the use of processes that embody respect for offender dignity, give a meaningful opportunity for all interested parties to be heard, and give voice to community values on a localized basis. RJ provides a framework for addressing these needs. Thus even committed proponents of retributive proportionality might find some appeal in RJ processes and common ground with RJ proponents who seek transformative restructuring of the criminal justice system. (325)

Consistent with the point that intervention must be culturally sensitive, RJ appears to be an appropriate practice within the African culture in general and within the Bénin religio-cultural setting in particular.

African restorative justice tradition: Don John O. Omale calls attention to the non-Western cultural dispute resolution tradition as "a more valuable resource than our retributive tradition" in the twenty-first century (35). Focusing on the African restorative tradition, he shows that African citizens were resolving their disputes by means of informal justice forums. These forums came to be assigned an unjust status of "obstacles to development during the colonial" era in order to be replaced by the retributive system. The richness of the tradition, however, is that enforcement of law, justice, and order were carried out within the context of social relationships taken seriously. Such enforcement was done with a high level of public participation intimating that once an agreement was reached parties involved had a built-in sense that disobeying again is an affront to the whole community and may incur social ostracism (46). For this reason, concerned parties (victims and offenders) rarely challenge an agreement reached by fear of not being ostracized socially or going on in life as a living dead (i.e., physically alive but socially dead). All throughout a justice process, participants maintain a sense of respect and politeness toward ancestral supernatural spirits who "may be disquieted by the breaking of rules and quarrelling" (47). Keeping and seeking peace for the sake of social harmony is needed. Current persons are socio-spiritually linked to the community that has gone before them, and their affront to legal measures may cause a breakdown of the social tissue or a breakdown of the tie that binds them together.

The well-known South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission is an historical case in point to testify about the rightful place of such a restorative approach. Archbishop M. Desmond Tutu who championed the leadership of the reconciliation recounts in a moving way how forgiveness came between the former foes during the darkest period of South Africa. Given the deep atrocities human beings have been through in that country, Tutu says that virtually everybody agreed that South Africa needed to deal effectively with these atrocities but the question was *how* to deal with it successfully. Finally the option of trial as a way of dealing with this heavy past was rejected because many found the court inefficient in dealing with wounds in people's hearts. Tutu explains by reporting one declaration showing the positive effect of TRC: "Archbishop, we have told our story to many on several occasions, to newspapers and to the TV This is the first time though that after telling it we feel as if a heavy load has been removed from our shoulders" (27). The option of offering blanket amnesty was equally rejected in order for the nation "to rehabilitate and affirm the dignity of those who for so long had been silenced, had been turned into anonymous, marginalized one" (30). Offering blanket amnesty would not allow those people to tell their stories and to remember in a way that fosters healing and acknowledges them "to be persons with an inalienable personhood" (30). This posture led the country to take a third way:

> [G]ranting amnesty to individuals in exchange for a full disclosure relating to the crime for which amnesty was being sought. It was the carrot of possible freedom in exchange for truth and the stick was, for those already in jail, the prospect of lengthy prison sentences and, for those still free, the probability of arrest and prosecution and imprisonment. (30)

Tutu places the choice of South Africa in its context, which is *Ubuntu*, a very difficult expression to render in a Western language. For the sake of understanding it is an

expression that communicates the relational, social, communitarian way Africans perceive human beings:

> [A] person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are. (31)

Such a notion of human beings largely shared in the Africa continent defies the nature, content, and procedure of a retributive justice system. Bénin's indigenous way of life used to give room to a sort of restorative process when socially disturbing acts occur. The presence of such process in traditional Bénin is what Béninese Stéphane Bigo communicates when he talks about old style justice practices in Africa and in Bénin:

> These practices vary from village to village. One sees the importance of a customary justice rendered by judges and auxiliaries of justice who know local traditions. The first court of Africa is Palaver [a meeting held usually under a tree to discuss the affairs pertaining to life in the village]; the first judges are the elders. This palaver does not end before all the protagonists agree together. (17)

The contemporary retrieval of the practice of RJ in the Western world is a good incentive to go back to the former practice of justice. This sort of restorative justice practice done as followers of Jesus Christ requires some theological rethinking in Bénin's Christianity for the practice to bear transformative marks.

Narrative methodology in reconstruction. Social science disciplines have been approached from a rationalistic perspective throughout the centuries due to the hegemony of Western civilization. Disciplines such as counseling and conflict resolution have known theories and practices made up from that viewpoint. Discussing about the field of counseling, K. J. Bradt says that the rationalistic approach led to the treatment of an

individual "in strict isolation from the contaminating influence of environment, family and other variables" (82). As people's experiences proved this approach to be unsuccessful, family therapists forsook it and began to see pathology in more than the one individual alone. Bradt explains, "Instead they observed all family members and studied family structure, interaction, behavior, and process. They conceived 'pathology' not in any one individual but in the operations of the whole family system" (82). Despite all its helpfulness compared to the old individualistic paradigm of counseling, the family system approach has come under several attacks, the basic of which being that its proponents "have unwittingly retained an empiricist epistemology regarding their own clinical observations and research" (83).

The same empiricism holds true in the field of conflict resolution where interest-based solutions and problem-solving, assumptions and techniques pervade the practice. John Windslade and Gerard Monk expose the rationalistic and European nature of those assumptions and offer valid critiques about them. The empiricist approach says that "the opposition created by competing interests hardens into positions around which polarization occurs. The parties then concentrate on defending these positions while seeking to attack or undermine the position of the other party" (32).

The underlying assumptions of this empiricist approach upon which a valid reconstruction of justice in human relationships cannot work are (1) an individual-centered psychology rather than a social psychology that begins with a social view of human beings, (2) a view of individuals as driven primarily by internally generated needs expressed by their self-interests that must be taken into account during problem-solving work, trumping, therefore, the cultural, collective, or relational aspects of personhood, (3)

a view of conflict as arising because individual needs are being met, leading the task of mediator to be that of finding solutions that will meet the need of each party, and (4) a view of the mediator as an objective, neutral third party, a scientist-practitioner, a detached neutral observer whose expertise allow the application of universally accepted truths (Windslade and Monk 32-35). The questioning of these built-in assumptions allows for modern certainty regarding knowing reality to now come under serious doubt:

> [A]ssertion about the nature of reality no longer can be made with the same kind of absolute certainty or predictability as before. Knowledge of reality must be forthcoming about its inherent limitations and concede that it is finally always relative, discontinuous, uncertain, indeterminate, containing potential complementarities and possibilities yet to be explored. (Bradt 95)

The change expressed here in the way reality is constructed serves to temper both therapeutic and criminal justice imposition of predefined realities on offenders through their theories and practices.

Nonnarrative approaches have the power to confer to people of other culture foreign narratives embedded in theories and practices used for counseling and conflict work process. When used from a Christian perspective, disconnected biblical portions are often employed as means of Christianizing those theories. In response to the unhelpfulness of available empiricist approaches, narrative approach holds better promises in the context of counseling people with antisocial behaviors and in the context of practicing restorative justice in order to reconstruct the lives of conflicted parties. According to Winslade and Monk, in mediation, the adjective narrative refers not simply to a concern for the storytelling phase of the mediation but to a totally different mode of thinking (52).

Given the complexity of everyone's story, the narrative approach refuses to engage in the search of the one true story and instead welcomes the complexity of competing stories and numerous influential background stories. By preferring process to technique, narrative practitioners emphasize the dynamic, shifting, and changing elements of mediation rather than abstractions, facts, or structures, thus, narrative users are "invited to think about and work with the responses of the conflicting parties rather than follow some static, preconceived plan" (Winslade and Monk 57) as happens with criminal justice and popular therapeutic approaches. Narrative approach as discussed by Alice Morgan and Gerard Monk et al., with its Christian appropriation as discussed by E. Wimberly and Burrell David Dinkins serve as guidelines for counseling. The following lines discuss Dinkins' insights.

Dinkins's specific points in pastoral narrative counseling are: active listening, inductive vs. deductive approach, pastoral conversation, questions, reproductive vs. deductive approach thinking. Active listening involves listening beyond the presenting problem and enters the person's dreadful stories in order to "assist [him or her] in the development of a more hopeful and future-oriented story" (21). This posture requires counselors to develop a conversational approach to counseling, in which they "speak as naturally as possible, using everyday words" (21) and seek to avoid approach that take on an air of professional counseling. Downplaying professionalism is important because of the inductive approach that suits the narrative approach instead of the deductive approach. The inductive method causes the counselor to use strategic questioning to expanding the presenting problem into a broader perspective whereas in the deductive approach, the counselor wants to find and pick bits and pieces of information in the

counselee's story that will fit into his/her predetermined way of thinking (theory) about people's problems. The use of active listening and inductive methods leads to pastoral conversations, which focus on emphasizing "the flow of communication in a conversational relationship of respect and mutuality" (30-31). Conversation is understood here as a metaphor helpful in moving "away from the notion that counseling is mainly advice or therapy" (32), and embrace an approach whereby "reality and meaning are created through dialogical storied conversation and action" (38). Pastoral conversation is also a spiritual conversation in the sense that it recognizes the presence of a third party, the Holy Spirit, in the dialogue. In this sense, the pastor or the gifted layperson enters the dialogue without a specific agenda "but as a way of being the incarnational presence of Christ for others" and leading the conversation in a way that "the focus of the story creation is primarily on the person being helped" (38-39). Pastoral conversation depends on the use of questions and the kinds of questions used. A healthy narrative approach demands that these questions must never dwell on weaknesses, faults and failures. They must be insightful and help counselees widen the scope of their stories. The main purpose of questions is not a mere exploration of people's stories. They must serve "to create new possibilities probably not thought of before by either party in the conversation" (51). Nevertheless, pastoral counselors working with biblical worldview cannot help but be influence by their Christian beliefs, biblical narratives, and the culture of the communities of their faith where they serve as ministers. Hence, their questions cannot be "free from value meanings and implications," (54) as secular counselors falsely assume theirs are. With that approach, narrative counselors are able to lead their counselees in productive thinking and actions by referring to a repertoire of past knowledge help counselees think

"creatively about the many ways the problems could be viewed" (62), and "try new ways of looking at the story" (63). The attempts at trying new ways can be reflective of an embrace of Christian lifestyle and of helpful traditional ways that have been abandoned due to modernity.

In terms of reconstructing relationships between offenders and victims, the process of narrative mediation as discussed by Winslade and Monk serves as a foundational guideline. Windslade and Monk ground their approach in social constructivism thereby rejecting, in conflict resolution, a quick fix problem solving approach as a means of defending the interests of a party against those of the other (32-33). By embracing the metaphor of narrative approach, they argue that resolution or mediation brings out background stories related to a specific conflict. These stories may include stories of relationship, family stories, cultural stories, and even fictional stories (53). In that framework they define mediation as follows:

> The task of mediation can be considered to be a teasing our of these stories in order to open up possibilities for alternatives stories to gain an audience. Rather than searching for the one true story, the narrative mode of thinking welcomes the complexity of competing stories and numerous influential background stories. Out of this complexity can emerge a range of possible futures from which parties to a mediation can choose. (53)

This method is at odd with the professional approach now in vogue in relation to responding to antisocial behaviors, both in the criminal justice and counseling psychology systems, yet the method is similar to the traditional Béninese method of handling conflicts.

Theologically driven intervention. Embarking in culturally sensitive and narrative treatments of antisocial persons without incorporating spirituality or religion is impossible. Culture and spiritually are intertwined in many parts of the world. Moreover,

people, particularly in Africa, can hardly relay the narrative of their lives without some religious aspects coming out from their stories. This intermingling of culture and religion is true not only for African cultures but also for other non-Western cultures. K. L. Hazel and G. V. Mohatt in a collaborative study shows that the Alaska native worldview incorporates a circular synthesis and balance of physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual processes within a protective layer of family, communal, or cultural beliefs and practices embedded within the larger environment. Bigo makes this important observation about the practice of justice in Africa:

> Because people's lives are mixed with magico-religious practices, justice is often linked to religion.... All African [justice] matter involving cosmic forces of the invisible world, it is important to pacify them first in order to avoid being in an impasse. One cannot expect the working out of an earthly problem if the spirits involved have not being harmonized in the world beyond. We see in this context that a western justice guided by a penal code or a uniform civil code treating only the social and material aspects of issues between individuals appear problematic. (17)

Worldviews such as this one can hardly accept or incorporate any social healing approach that does not address spirituality. Hazel and Mohatt comment on the role of spirituality in achieving sobriety:

> [T]he sobriety process is mediated by a set of cultural and spiritual variables that provide meaning, moderate and attenuate individual and collective trauma, and provide access to and a willingness to utilize interpersonal, personal, and collective resources that raise the probability of either never abusing alcohol or of recovering from addiction. (547)

Spirituality is discovered as an "integral part of the culture and spiritual development is essential to self-identity" (547), which, when reached, alters emotional and mental problems significantly. Achieving healthy self-identity from a native worldview perspective happens when one is restored to "family connection, relations with elders and ancestors, and ... [to] one's knowledge and practice of cultural and spiritual tradition"

(547). Likewise, with the Afrocentric MAAT program approach to antisocial behaviors, spirituality is highly prized:

> Each session incorporates a unity circle—the holding of each other's hands. During this opening ritual a series of nondenominational spiritual readings are done and each youth is asked to call out the name of a deceased person, either a family member, a friend, or a historical person of African descent. This ritual demonstrates respect and honor for African ancestors. The youths are also reminded that all interactions are sacred [life is a spiritual phenomenon to be lived from a moral perspective] and that they are children of the Creator. (Harvey 203)

The content of spiritualities such as this one can appear disturbing to Christian faith. Nevertheless, spirituality does have a good and important function in the process.

The need to incorporate culture and spirituality in treatment calls for the need to engage, as Christians, the treatment of ASPD or antisocial behaviors from an appropriate Christian perspective. This sort of engagement is crucial because just taking spirituality seriously in a practice does not mean that the practice is already Christ honoring. In fact, some practitioners can use spiritual treatments without any explicit Christian tone to it (DiLorenzo, Johnson, and Bussey 257-73) because people may call on their ancestors, deceased elders, and other deities for help. While some content of indigenous practices are troubling regarding Christian faith, outright rejection of indigenous worldviews without serious theological engagement with them is not conducive to transformation. Some characteristics of what theological or spiritual dimension might entail are as follows:

First, the recovery of a biblical worldview of personhood is necessary. The notion of person as a skin-bound individual autonomously isolated from others and from the invisible world is a pure Enlightenment import. Although that concept seems to be assumed in some parts of Christianity, a thorough biblical and theological cannot support

it. Person thus understood encouraged the rise of emphasis on *personality*—the inner, psychodynamic organization of an individual that expresses itself in relation to God and other people—instead of *character*—the traits, attitudes, or behaviors of an individual that publicly express private conviction—as it was known before the Enlightenment (Warren 537-45). H. A. Warren expresses the danger of the shift from character to personality:

> By abandoning character for personality, the religious educators turned the locus of moral behavior from the public arena to the private. Emphasizing the development of personality as the Christian's primary task meant assigning greater weight to individuals' internal dynamics and interpersonal relationships than to the social and political action of making a better world. (544)

The shift is also expressed in the preoccupation of defining individual personality types as the most important thing instead of building people's characters for a better living in family and society. While Mary E. Clark's evolutionary perspective and her way of treating Christianity's conception of human being is problematic. She is right when she argues that a society's conception of human nature determines how its people behave and their conception about justice. She insightfully argues that the common Skinner-based Western notion of human beings as naturally competitive and selfish in need of behavioral training is more prone to retributive justice (163). She contrasts this understanding with a pro-social, cooperative and striving-to-contribute view of human beings as found in the major religions of the world, including Christianity (pre-Nicene Creed and pre-Constantine, non-fundamentalist, gospel of Thomas based). Attaching this perspective to Jesus also leads her to see him as the wise teacher who teaches people their self-discovery and recognition of their inner feeling toward others and the universe as a whole (170). Whereas her description of true Christianity is problematic, her aim is on

target (i.e., justice takes place at the interface of individuals and the kind of society of which they are a part). This way of understanding the human person is necessary to establish "the capacity among all societies to discover peaceful processes for healing social rifts, and [create] a global milieu for respectful cross-cultural dialogue to replace the disastrous, power-based Skinnerian carrot-and-stick threats that are now all too much in evidence" (174). Most indigenous traditions, such as African traditions, perceive a person's life as similar to the biblical Hebrew worldview as described by G. E. Whitlock:

> The life of a man is an organic whole. His total interests belong together. His spiritual, social, physical, economic, political, or so-called secular interests are simply different aspects of [a person's] relationship to a complex world. Hence, a man's problem is not only his relatedness to himself, but also his relatedness to his world. (12)

This description points to the importance of recovering such a worldview and work from it so as to build characters instead of merely labeling people who exhibit antisocial behaviors and trying managerial reductionistic techniques.

Second, a proper theological engagement must embrace an integrated view of salvation as healing. This integrated view is unlike the popular minimalist view whereby the most important thing is to have one's conscience cleared so that one has been declared justified at a moment of decision to receive Christ in one's heart. To the contrary, needed is the embrace of a biblical worldview of contextual understanding of salvation as truly affecting personal beings and relationships, and bearing consequences on society. This approach calls for believing that God, through Christ and the present work of the Spirit can be active in healing persons beyond what human theories and techniques for responding to antisocial persons can attain. Salvation, understood from a wholistic perspective on human nature as previously described, cannot be, in the modern

sense, "the means by which human dignity can cross over the bridge between this life and the next" (Green, *Salvation* 23). Green's description of salvation is rather consistent with antisocial persons' need for true meaning, identity, and relationships:

> [B]iblical portraits of human nature point toward restoration to covenantal relationship to God, recovery of human community in its vitality, and the reintegration of one's self as a person fully embodied in relation to others and to the world in which life with and before God might be lived. (23)

Such a description of Scriptural salvation shed light on the fictive notion of individualized salvation, which is somehow the cherished vision of salvation in many quarters of evangelical Christianity.

Delving into the narrative of the Old and New Testaments concerning Yawheh as the Healer, Green comes out with an elastic concept of salvation as healing. This understanding is crucial because "salvation speaks to the wide diversity of our life experiences, all of them, all of us" (Green, *Salvation* 60). With this orientation Green helpfully resists reductions of all kinds that lead to isolated (i.e., my need, my treatment, my health) and segregated (i.e., spiritual versus physical, relational versus genetic) ways of viewing problems and self (60-61). This integrated view of salvation is what is needed for a better engagement with the complex world of antisocial persons theologically.

Within this perspective, the healing sought is beyond that of antisocial persons. It goes beyond them and reaches the kind of society in which they live, a society embedded in a false notion of punishment. T. Richard Snyder argues that the phenomenon of punishment is a social ill, the well-exemplified form being its expression in prisons. Prison punishment, Snyder holds, is less a result of human approach to handling the business of social crimes but more a manifestation of a deep-seated illness. If the spirit of punishment remains unaddressed no one can pretend that any call for reform will be

heard. The spirit of punishment, as spread throughout society, is a result of the kind of ethic Protestantism has taught, lived, and spread throughout the world. For Snyder, "there is a connection between the punitive ethos [in our modern societies] and Christian theology as it is popularly understood" (11). To this effect Protestant theology and ethic have "wittingly or unwittingly played into the hands of such a spirit" by giving it rise and providing support for it (11). Nowhere in Protestant theology is this reality more alive than in its understanding of God's grace: "[T]he dominant understanding of nature and grace within popular religion today, especially in its Protestant form, makes room for and sometimes even gives rise to a spirit of punishment" (11). To make himself clear, Snyder maintains that contemporary crisis of punishment is supported by two distortions: (1) absence of creation grace leading to believing that those whose condition are unfortunate (e.g., criminals, sick, poor) are reaping the just desserts of their unredeemed state, and (2) grace understood in exclusively in individualistic, internalized, nonhistorical terms leading to believing that redemption is only personal but not corporate or institutional so as to influence public policies or structures (12-13). Wherever these views of God's grace are active healing is needed.

Third, another related theological point is that the task of reconstruction indicates the ability to change, unlike the biological deterministic assumption that antisocial persons cannot change. Within the framework of reconstruction, conversion becomes not only a one-time decision but also a process of socialization entailing "autobiographical reconstruction" (Green, "Conversion in Luke-Acts" 15). Working from Lukan materials, Green provides a helpful explanation of conversion in that regard:

> [Conversion] shatters one's past and reassembles it in accordance with the new life of the converted; former understanding of one's self and one's

> experiences are regarded as erroneous and are provided new meaning.... More pervasive are those instances where one's reformed allegiances and dispositions are expressed in terms that reflect a creative imagination, especially with regard to revisionist conceptualizations of the character of the people of God.... Converts find explanations for phenomena in terms that are appropriate to the pattern of life they have embraced and that are distinctive from the conceptual patterns held by persons outside the community of the converted. (15)

This definition of conversion is helpful in a context of ministry with antisocial persons. Lake believes that "it is the essential task of clinical theology to draw attention to God's reparative work in [the] most stringent of all clinical situations" (820). To this effect, he directs attention to the possibility of such a reparative work in difficult persons based on the death of Christ:

> The death of Christ, at an infinite distance from God and in total rejection, is God's Word to [human beings] who are in an abyss like it. The presence everywhere on the human scene of His Holy Spirit is in order to make this work of the Father and the Son effective in those human deprivations and depravities which afflict or defile [human beings]. The cleavages of existence which have severed the original connection between the possibilities of infinitude in the mind of [a human being] and the existential necessities of his bodily and social connection, and his moral duties, are in principle, now no longer unbridgeable. It is, so to speak, this crevasse of ontological terror which the body of Christ alters by His presence in hell. When we fall into it, we need no longer fall to our death or madness, because the Spirit of His endurance is present to sustain us with a like fortitude. (820)

The unique and exclusive importance of the death of Christ in the reparation of human beings and particularly of antisocial persons is emphasis here. Taking seriously the difficult nature of people with difficult personalities such as the schizoidic, Lake remains optimistic about the possibility of transformation in Christ. He recounts the story of a student who wrestled with the problem of evil and the Trinity but who also "encountered Christ, as crucified, at the worst moment of her breakdown" (820). With this view on the possibility for human transformation through the death of Christ, bearing evident effect

even on persons' moral lives, practices that engage antisocial behaviors may bring social restoration and healing.

Discipling in the therapeutic faith community. This works maintains that discipling in and for therapeutic faith communities is essential for the sake of consistency with the aforementioned points. Discipleship programs that do not promote healing in emotional and relational aspects of human beings are irrelevant. Counseling approaches and techniques that hold spirituality, in general, and Christ, in particular, in an anathema position are also unhelpful for the vision desired by this work. An appropriate vision of discipleship is championed by Peter R. Holmes who criticizes the fact that the church mediates God's grace to the individual instead of being a community formed on the analogy of the Trinitarian interpersonal relationship (41). This approach seeks a relational appropriation of the concept of *imago Dei* so that "to become more fully human, to become our real selves, we must learn to be at ease as a public relational self, rather than confining imago Dei to its traditional private personal expression" (59). Although respectful of what psychology can bring to the process of discipleship, Holmes is right in his assessment that psychology lacks the relational and authentic spirituality and ends up treating people in discrete fragmented terms. In response to the theological individualization of grace, the psychological fragmentation of human beings in treatment, Holmes suggests what he calls Rapha discipleship journey (83). Such a discipleship aims at working toward becoming more fully human, which means essentially embarking on the journey of Christlikeness. He discusses that journey as follows:

> Using Christ-likeness as our aim also allows us to tie in our new understanding of social Trinity, giving us a relational understanding of pneumatic personhood. The Persons of the Trinity, and a human person, can both in a certain sense become *perichoretic*, having the capacity to

> interpenetrate into each other and bridge both realities, material and spiritual, within numerous other love-centered relationships. This is I believe is authentic Christ-likeness. But in this process of becoming more like Christ, individuals also become community,... drawing others into themselves and Christ. Community becomes an essential part of personal wholeness. (82)

In such a journey of Christlikeness Holmes does well by maintaining that concern for discipleship in Christian communities should no longer be split from that of therapeutic change as they have usually been (85-88). This orientation causes Holmes to provide a therapeutic meaning of the concept of being born again: "[a] transformation focused on Christ through the Holy Spirit through our human spirit flowing into all our relationships. This is Redemption through transformation led by Christ" (88). The model of discipleship suggested is useful for the purpose of this work because its goal is to foster positive personal change, by meeting Jesus, by letting go of the past, and being able to extend one's capacity to become a full member of the church, of the community, and of the society at large (130). In this integrative (not eclectic) endeavor, the helper is better seen as a spiritual director or teacher whose strategy is a practice of theology, seeking people's wholeness as Christlikeness, a journey with oneself (as spiritual director or teacher) and the care receivers (130).

This perspective is an alternative to existing nontherapeutic ways of being present in society as the Church and provides the best model for the kind of discipleship needed, i.e., one that seeks to carry out therapeutic discipleship through Christ.

Conclusion

The review of literature concludes that the task of reconstructing justice in response to the escalating phenomenon of antisocial behaviors in Porto-Novo and Cotonou is multilayered. The study discusses the metaphor of eighth century BC Amos

and Hosea whose urban ministries shed light on the importance of countering social forces that aim at destroying human lives. Jesus' ministry as discussed by Luke in the third Gospel and Acts shed light on the death of Jesus as an indictment of political and legal powers. A proper understanding of Jesus' ministry and death in the context of antisocial behaviors goes against current legal tendencies and the call to respond to those trends in an integrated way. This integrated approach is equally emphasized in current African theology of reconstruction, which calls the church to change its current ecclesiological identity and practices in order to bear witness for the purpose of reconstruction. The study discovers serious weaknesses in popular nontherapeutic and therapeutic responses to the phenomena of antisocial behaviors. This discovery points to the importance of taking seriously a number of factors in any effective response to the issue under consideration: family, community, and cultural resiliencies, restorative justice, narrative methodology, and theology. From the discussion of literature thus far, this study introduces a model of reconstruction of justice as schematized in Figure 2.1.

The model as represented shows that the different elements that participate in justice reconstruction are indispensable to this effect. Nothing should be neglected. Moreover, each component in the model is interrelated to the other, and in this way they contribute together to the reconstruction of justice. This interrelation means that they reinforce one another and must not operate in contradiction. For instance, social ministries and narrative therapy must not operate in a way that counters discipleship, and vice versa. Rather, they must complement one another in an integrative manner toward the common goal of reconstructing justice that heals and restores personally and collectively. The fact that the arrows go from the center to elements on the edge

expresses that when justice is reconstructed in society every aspect that participated in that reconstruction will be strengthened and reinforced.

The interrelation expressed here does not convey that the entire component must be in place before a congregation begins to respond to antisocial behaviors. Nor does it mean that each congregation is expected to have the entire component in place even in a long-term basis. The interrelation conveys an awareness that all the components of this model are necessary in the current situation. Because they are necessary, all the Church, not just isolated congregations or denominations, are necessary for the task. Because they are necessary, all the congregations in a given city, not just a select few, are important. When the voice of God is heard within that framework, it is likely that he will raise up all the necessary human, material, and financial resources in order for evangelicals in Bénin to respond to the challenges at stake. It remains to see to what extent evangelicals in Bénin are similar or dissimilar in their current and forward looking responses to antisocial behaviors.

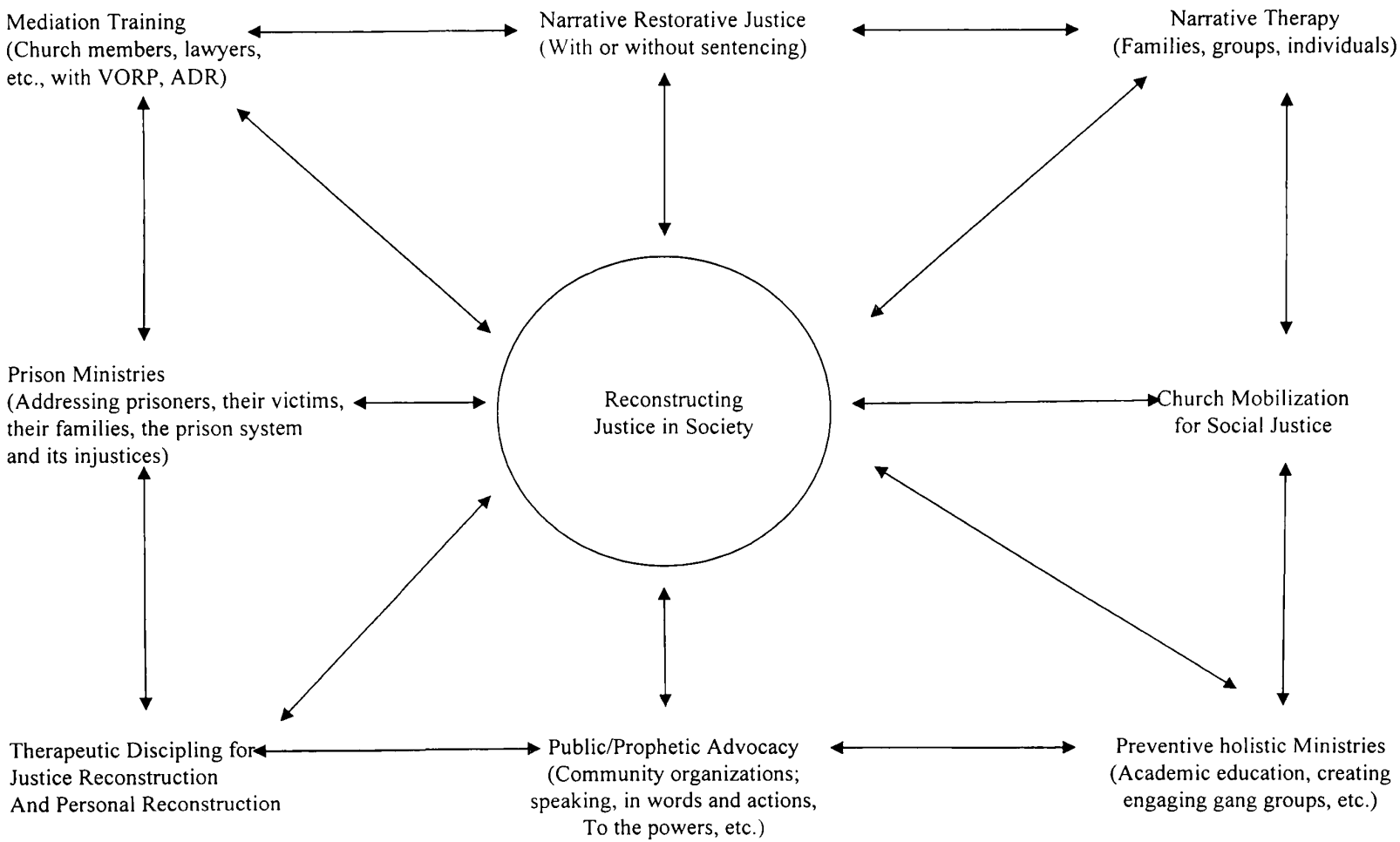

Figure 2.1. A Reconstruction Model of Responding to Antisocial Behaviors

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

The reality of antisocial behaviors and the extent of their occurrences are escalating in the urban settings of Cotonou and Porto-Novo. The context of the strong evangelical presence in the public arena of Bénin is the preoccupation of this research. Authorized responses to these phenomena are centered mainly on the criminal justice sentencing process built after the Western model of justice. Urban populations in Bénin still witness the problem of antisocial behaviors today despite years of utilization of criminal justice responses. Based on current African theology of reconstruction and on a social criticism reading of Christian Scriptures, this work maintains that the church is called to be an agent of social reconstruction. A church that is awakened to the social disintegrative realities around it and to its calling of reconstruction cannot continue to live in indifference *vis-à-vis* the social ill of antisocial behaviors and punishment. Professor Mana expresses that opinion very well:

> [I]nsofar as the plan of God is the salvation of the World, the pastoral task required today is that of organizing the people of God and Christian communities for new activities and new strategies for social change, and for building a new society. This is indeed the task of a new evangelization of Africa in this new millennium. This means organizing the people of God to prepare themselves effectively to face the major problems of destiny and the problems that plague us everyday. (*Christian and Churches* 103)

In Bénin, one such problem, the most preoccupying in the whole nation, is the issue of escalating occurrences of antisocial behaviors. The purpose of this study was to describe current responses of evangelical congregations in Porto-Novo and Cotonou toward antisocial behaviors in the context of Bénin's failing criminal justice system. This was a

descriptive study based on semi-structured focus group interviews protocol. Because I was residing in the U. S. at the time of this study, a research assistant was hired in Bénin in order to facilitate the collection of data.

Research and Operational Questions

This research used semi-structured interview protocols with participants chosen on the basis of predetermined criteria for the gathering of data. The created interview guides follow suggestions by Wiersma and Jurs regarding data collection for qualitative research (205). This research is considered qualitative because I did not have to intervene in or manipulate the research setting in any way. The fact that this research looks at the studied situation in a holistic manner (i.e., looking at multiple contributing factors) makes it qualitative research (203).

This study began by seeking to answer the question concerning the extent to which evangelical churches in Cotonou and Porto-Novo are currently involved in responding to the social problem this research raises. The study answered this question through interviewing those selected among evangelicals in both cities for the research.

Firstly, this research was interested in characteristics describing the level of awareness of antisocial behaviors among evangelicals in Cotonou and Porto-Novo.

Secondly, this research attempted to learn characteristics describing the involvement of the urban evangelical churches' Christian ministry in Porto-Novo and Cotonou in their response to the public crisis of antisocial behaviors.

Thirdly, this study explored how evangelical congregations in Cotonou and Porto-Novo evaluate the work being done by the Béninese criminal justice system.

Fourthly, this research was concerned with knowing in what ways church members envision to become more active in responding to the crisis of antisocial behaviors in their respective neighborhoods. This aspect of the research questionnaires consisted in discussing with and collecting from the participants some ideas that they think might be helpful for an eventual church's involvement with responding to antisocial behaviors. I sought to learn whether participants expect the church to make any difference or not and what that difference might be. Both church members and church leaders or pastors were instrumental in this learning process.

Individual Participants

Given that this research addresses the identity and witness of evangelical churches in Cotonou and Porto-Novo, several congregations would not agree to participate without some form of recommendation. Agreement to participate in this research was obtained through three steps. Firstly, I obtained a letter of recommendation from the Missionary Movement for the Evangel of Christ (MMEC), a Bénin-based interdenominational evangelical mission organization to which I am affiliated as a founding member (see Appendix K). Secondly, that letter was presented to every local pastor as a way of asking permission on behalf of the movement to proceed with the research. Some local churches readily accepted that recommendation while other local churches referred me back to the national headquarters of their denomination for a letter of permission from their hierarchical authorities. Thirdly, whenever necessary, I went to such denominational headquarters and obtained authorization before I proceeded to the focus group interview at the local church level.

Within one week of the actual date of interview, phone calls and e-mails reminded every participant of the forthcoming conversation. These reminders were also ways of obtaining confirmation of their availability for the chosen date.

The choice of participants in this research relied on selectivity. Participants in this research were adult leaders or members of urban evangelical churches situated within Cotonou and Porto-Novo. They represented people who can make reliable judgments on their churches' relationship with the issues raised by the research. Church members interviewed in this research are active members of the selected local churches for a minimum length of three years and have been recommended by the pastors as such. The pastors and church members on whom this study was based are those who expressed willingness to participate. This choice limits the data on those I was able to reach. This study may be missing important information and ideas from those who were not willing or available to participate. Some of the members from the churches had experiences with antisocial persons either as direct victims or as someone very close to a victim.

Some of the members have been approached directly based on my research assistant's prior knowledge of their membership stance in their local church. However, in overall the local pastor or leader was first persuaded based by the letter of contact and through him other church members were selected. After his own persuasion, the pastor invited church members to volunteer during one or two worship service announcements. The pastor or leader of the local church arranged for the meeting by persuading a select number of his congregation according to criteria contained in my introductory letter. Those criteria were as follows:

√ Anyone from 18 to 60 years old;

√ Anyone who has been member of church for the past three years;

√ Although not necessary, anyone who has been affected (either directly or through another person such as family members) by a significant criminal act; and,

√ Anyone who can represent the important views in terms of doctrines and practices that the church holds dear and fundamental (see Appendix F).

Congregational Participants

The selection of local congregations was based on my research assistant's ability to know which congregations are evangelicals in each city. He already knew most of these congregations while others were discernible through the signposts they have on the front of their church building. This study then was based on a number of researcher-selected congregations that gave preference to certain evangelical congregations and not others. Specific criteria considered in the selection of congregations in each city were (1) no more than one local congregation in a city belonging to a specific denomination, (2) the four congregations to be considered in each city must belong each to different geographical areas in the city, and (3) an effort needs to be made to consider congregations who are foreign-mission related as well as those who are indigenous-ministry related.

I also based this research on openness on the part of the pastors or leaders of selected congregations to carry this research with them and other representative members of their churches. Preference was given to evangelical congregations whose pastors were persuaded about the worthiness of this study and then chose to cooperate. Also, because this study preferred various evangelical congregations from diverse regions within the city, some evangelical congregations, having heard about the study, wanted to participate

but could not be accepted because I wanted to give preference either to another congregation from a different denomination or to a congregation in another location within the city. The possibility exists that some of the urban evangelical churches, church leaders, and church members that were not part of this research because they were not targeted or were not available and thus could not be taken into account. Therefore, my personal judgments and the availability of the population might have produced a bias of selection and/or participation.

The research questions allowed me to evaluate some of the evangelical doctrines and practices related to Christians' involvement in society that I wanted to analyze in this study. Therefore, some biases are present in my attempt at gathering the data for which I looked. The semi-structured interview format allows room for gathering other data that I might not have taken into account. The topic guide of the interview also reflected my bias in that such topics were relevant to the study. The fact that the research questions allow a natural flow of discussion favored the possibility of drawing important information that respondents were willing to share.

This research proceeded by interviewing four focus groups of four to six persons from each congregation from each city. This limited number is recommended by literature (Krueger and Casey 2) and allows the researcher to gather insights based on the interventions of all participants. Each group was formed from persons of the same local church or the same denomination in order to attempt a harmonized view out of each interview. Urban evangelical congregations affiliated with a variety of denominations were also considered as much as possible.

Instrumentation

This study used two research instruments. The first instrument was a questionnaire that served to gather data pertaining to participants' background and church demographic. One part dealt with participating churches' demographics by which I tried to learn the church's name, denominational affiliation, membership, ministries, and participating church members' ministry involvement. Another part of the questionnaire was designed to gather pastors', leaders', and church members' background information in terms of education, ministry experience, and present ministry.

The second instrument was a focus group interview protocol. Each focus group was made up of a pastor or leader and selected church members of his congregation. The first contact took place by meeting the pastor either by telephone or by personal visit (by my assistant) depending on which method best suited the given pastor's situation. During the first contact with pastors or leaders, this project was presented to them (see Appendix F). Whenever the first contact was successful, the second part of the research consisted of the selection of focus group members through the active involvement of their pastor or leader based on the directives given to this person in the introductory letter (see Appendix F). The first directive is related to the age range. The broad range (18 to 60 years) is due to the fact that this study wanted to take in account both younger and older adults' views. The second directive pertaining to participants' three-year membership is due to the fact that this study wanted to take into account views expressed by persons who are active members and likely to be mature in their faith. The third directive is a welcome criteria but not necessary and is designed to have the voice of those who have had some experiences with antisocial behaviors as victims. The fifth directive, which is related to

the third, is designed to have participants who are outspoken about their congregation's beliefs and practices and can, therefore, handle critical thoughts about their ministries. In overall the rationale for local pastors and leaders is that this study cannot represent the view of a local congregation without the active involvement of its local pastor and his or her presence during the interview.

I formulated interview questions in order to respond to the four research questions identified in this study. The following lines show how the research questions were considered in the way I designed the interview questionnaire.

1. *What level of awareness of antisocial behaviors currently describes evangelical congregations in Cotonou and Porto-Novo?*

I answered this research question by taking into consideration participants' responses to the first part of the first question on the list of the focus group interview discussion questions (see Appendix H). Precisely, participants' reactions to "*Tell me about antisocial behaviors in this city*" led them to demonstrate their level of awareness of antisocial behaviors in their cities.

2. *What characteristics describe the involvement of the evangelical churches' Christian ministry in Porto-Novo and Cotonou in their response to criminality and the public crisis of antisocial behaviors*?

This research question was answered by taking into consideration the background and demographic information (see Appendix G) in addition to the second part of question number 1 in the focus group section. The demographic data allowed for analyzing the congregation doctrines or practice about members' involvement in ministry in light of the current issue of antisocial behaviors. The second part of the first question in the focus

group discussion (i.e., How do antisocial behaviors affect the life and ministry of your congregation? see Appendix H) allowed particularly for getting insights into whether the rise of antisocial behaviors has affected them in specific ways or has already informed certain congregational ministry practices.

3. *How do evangelical congregations in Cotonou and Porto-Novo evaluate the work being done by the Béninese criminal justice system*?

In order to answer the above research question, this study paid attention to participants' responses to the second interview discussion question (i.e., What are your comments on the role of our criminal justice system in its response to antisocial behaviors?). When asked to comment about the role of the criminal justice system in its response to antisocial behaviors, participants rapidly found an opportunity to evaluate the system based on their personal experiences and also on the realities that the system brings to open to citizens.

4. *In what ways do church members envision becoming more active in responding to the phenomenon of antisocial behaviors in their respective neighborhoods*?

Interview protocol questions numbers 3 and 4 served to respond to research question # 4 (see Appendix H). The third question (i.e., Can you tell me, considering the needs of victims and perpetrators, what is the best approach for seeking justice in the context of antisocial behaviors?) is based on my assumption that if the church is to undertake ministry efforts in response to the issue it must come to envisioning a new way of seeing justice between victims and offenders, a way different from the one now offered by the criminal justice system. Dissatisfaction with the current response will certainly lead to an imaginative formulation of an alternative Christian ministry

responding to antisocial behaviors by taking in consideration the needs of both parties. The fourth question (i.e., What types of ministries can your congregation be doing or encouraging in order to seek justice between victims and perpetrators?) sought to explore participants' practical suggestions about the types of ministries they can encourage or set up in response to antisocial behaviors in their city. The fifth question, not consistently used during the process, sought to check what emphasis about justice between victims and perpetrators participants are likely to stress following the conversation.

Overall this study helped find out urban evangelicals' current awareness of antisocial behaviors and their responses to such behaviors in their society. The research evaluated participants' attitudes and opinions towards the Bénin criminal justice system's responses to antisocial behaviors and the achievement of those responses. The study estimates that the way urban evangelical churches evaluate the only criminal justice response to antisocial behaviors is critical if they are to stand up for other alternatives. Research questions also attempted to see whether or not respondents desire new solutions or approaches to the situation.

All questionnaires for this research were translated into French, and the data was received in French. The majority of participants in this research spoke French. A few of them spoke only Fon or Goun, two of Bénin's southern languages. I am fluent in both of these indigenous languages and in French and translated the data into English. The focus group interviews were conducted in French, Goun, or Fon, depending on the participants that made up a specific focus group.

Validity

The obtaining of recommendation from an evangelical interdenominational ministry, the MMEC, was crucial in the process of this study. Such a recommendation conferred credibility as to the purpose of this study. In order to make the interview questions as understandable as possible, my mentor looked them over and helped in the process. In addition, three French teachers in Bénin who are Christians reviewed the questions in French in order to give me input and help with the French language and comprehension. Insights from these consultations with my mentor and three pastors resulted in changes in the sentence structure of some of the questions and some of the wordings. As a result I reviewed general questions, wrote more specific questions, and forsook unnecessary questions. In order to facilitate smooth conversations, I recorded the phone discussion with a phone conversation recorder in order to give an undivided attention to participants instead of being preoccupied with note taking during focus group meetings.

Data Collection

The data collection for this research was carried out with the aid of a research assistant who is someone who knows the terrains of Cotonou and Porto-Novo and is also familiar with Béninese evangelicals. Such a person was a key element in contacting church leaders and church members in order to get them interested in this research. Once such a person was secured, I urged him to take in account the cross-denominational and cross-geographical approach for selecting participating congregations. Then, the following steps were taken during the data collection and serious care was taken to ensure

that this procedure remained the same for each pastor and congregation involved in this study.

First, only pastors or leaders and their congregations that are within Porto-Novo and Cotonou, areas well-known for antisocial behaviors in the cities, were considered in this study. This study then, being qualitative research, utilized interviewing as the only approach where I asked questions and received answers from the people I engaged as participants in my study (Robson 269). I used focus group interview protocols with a semi-structured interview approach. Colin Robson defines this latter saying:

> [Semi-structured interviews have] predetermined questions, but the order can be modified based upon the interviewer's perception of what seems most appropriate. Question wording can be changed and explanation given; particular questions which seem inappropriate with a particular interviewee can be omitted, or additional ones included. (270)

With this method then, while the research has some basic questions, they serve as guidelines and can be modified, explained, or added on during the interview process.

The present study, then, uses the selected interview questions with flexibility by adjusting to each interview context. Robson gives, among other reasons for using a qualitative research interview, the importance of focusing on the meaning of particular phenomena to the participants (Robson 271). Such a rationale justifies the choice of interview protocol in this study because I sought to explore the meaning of participants' faith in the context of antisocial behaviors and their subsequent responses to them. The use of interviews is also justified by the fact that, compared to questionnaire surveys, interviews allow one to work out some nonresponses from participants, provide opportunity for in-depth probing, elaboration, and clarification of terms, tend to be more

successful with open-ended items, and allow for collecting data from individuals who may not be reached with other research methods (Wiersma and Jurs 186-87).

Second, I requested and received a recommendation letter from an indigenous interdenominational evangelical movement, namely the MMEC, for presentation to the pastors and congregations contacted for this research. While such a recommendation was not presented to every pastor, it served to give some backing to me in case a pastor or leader asked for one.

Third, pastors or leaders were contacted primarily by phone in order to be invited to participate in this research and to grant permission to me for conducting the focus group interview by phone with their church members. I chose telephone interview strategy because of the inherent advantages attached to it. Wiersma and Jurs recognize the importance of telephone interviews in (1) allowing for reduced research costs, (2) putting participants in a less threatening research situation than face-to-face interviews, (3) allowing for a greater speed in collecting and processing data, and (4) spending less time in non-answered calls than experiencing non-kept face-to-face appointments (191).

While telephone interviews are widely done on a one-on-one basis and focus groups widely experienced in person, telephone focus group discussion is also a valid option. Richard A. Krueger and Mary Ann Casey are of the persuasion that "focus groups discussions can be conducted on the telephone" (1). Rosalind Hurworth equally shares the same persuasion and believes that while the phone group discussions can be done with sophisticated materials, "they are normally run as a simple conference call using an ordinary telephone, cordless phone or speakerphone" (2). Hurworth agrees that teleconferencing systems "are just as effective as face-to-face meetings" and sometimes

even more effective "for gathering factual information," "information exchange," "group discussions," and "information seeking" (2). One groundbreaking experience of using telephone focus group protocol comes from Hurworth when she was called upon to conduct a statewide needs assessment of the education needs of the over 60s in Australia. Given the skepticism of the funding that research, who doubted she would be able to get certain groups involved, she decided to continue on even though he found little to nothing about the use of telephone focus groups protocol in literature at the time. In the process she met the manager of a telephone link up program for older people, a program mainly designed for distance social contact (1-2). Having heard of her need, the manager responded by helping make the telephone group conferencing happen to the satisfaction of the participants. These people claimed in the end that it had been "*fantastic to have an intellectual discussion from our homes* [original emphasis]" (2). Additionally, Hurworth, as a researcher, also felt that the experience "had enabled the acquisition of an excellent set of data" (2). George Silverman who claimed seventeen years of experience with telephone focus groups in 2004 moved from defending telephone focus groups strategy as *almost as good* as face-to-face focus groups to defending that "telephone is the *preferable* [original emphasis] way to conduct *most* [original emphasis] focus groups." What justifies this preference, Silverman continues, is the fact that conducting telephone focus groups has the advantage of keeping participants in their most natural settings without, as face-to-face focus groups require, making them travel or move from their natural places for the purpose of meeting the researcher at an unnatural place. This advantage was present in this study because participants met together at a familiar place, such as their local churches.

Silverman rightly recommends that obstacles related to absence of nonverbal or gestured communication in a phone group setting be countered by taking into account vocal nonverbal signs that transpire through "tone of voice, choice of vocabulary, pitch level, number and kind of hesitations, rate of speed, trailing off or picking up of volume, and many other speech subtleties." If necessary measures are taken into account and the moderator or researcher is able audibly to *read* participants in a phone group conversation, a telephone group conference will work as much as a face-to-face focus group, and sometimes even more in terms of quality and cost effectiveness. According to Krueger and Casey, the following guiding principles, which were taken into account in this study, are important for successful phone focus groups:

√ Small size group—four to six recommended;

√ Share questions or discussion topics in advance;

√ Limit questions to five to eight;

√ Have participants identify themselves (if voices are not recognizable);

√ Limit the length to about sixty minutes;

√ Call on people who are not actively participating;

√ Periodically ask for round robin responses; and,

√ Include ending questions (Krueger and Casey 2).

Important examples of ending questions considered in this study are, "Of all the things we have discussed during our time together, what to you has been the most important or the most enlightening?" "The purpose of my study was to figure out … (insert a research question). Is there something important that you think I missed considering the ideas that we discussed?" "I will be conducting other group discussion very shortly, what do you

think I need to consider the most while discussing with other groups?" (Krueger and Casey 4).

Fourth, if a pastor or leader agreed to a phone interview with a group of church members, my research assistant left the demographic questionnaires to him and discussed the process of recruiting volunteers discussed with him. In order to recruit volunteers, pastors or leaders made public announcements at one or two of their congregation worship services telling about the research and the possible benefits of its findings for the life and ministry of the churches. They then presented the types of persons who were invited to participate and called on members within the congregation to contact them at the end of the service or to call them later to express a desire to participate. They then proceeded with setting a convenient time with all the members who expressed their willingness to participate. I adjusted my schedule to theirs in order to proceed with the focus group interview with everyone present.

As recommended in telephone focus group interview protocol, the researcher must make sure that focus group members are reminded of the conversation meeting at least a day prior to the time of the conversation and also even fifteen minutes prior to the meeting (Hurworth 2; Krueger and Casey 14). Thus, contacts were made with focus group members who agreed to participate in the discussion at least one day prior to the actual conference time in order to remind them of the meeting. Given that not all participants have personal phone contacts, only some were contacted by phone while others were paid visit to (by my assistant) in order to confirm the appointment arranged with them by their pastor or leader for the phone conference. My research assistant made and gave copies of the guiding questions and ground rules to the pastor for later use

during group conversations. At my own confirmation calling (for those that are reachable by phone), I made sure they had received copies of those questions and ground rules. In case they had not or had lost them in the meantime, I used whichever way was best (faxing, scanning, or hard copy through my assistant) to channel these materials to them prior to our discussion time in order to allow participants to begin thinking about the topics of the discussion I would be having with them before we met.

This research planned with pastors for a group of six to eight participants to avoid having less than four participants in case some members suddenly became unavailable and also in order to avoid having less than four volunteers from local congregations. Available phone group discussion literature assumes a phone conversation whereby participants are located in different places and could join or be joined (by the interviewer) through different phone numbers (Krueger and Casey 2; Hurworth 2). However, the present study used a slightly different approach. I called focus group members while they were together in the same room at a place with which they were all familiar. Thus, through one phone number connected to a speaker, everyone was able to hear one another at the same time, and I heard everyone else's intervention. In addition to the focus group members, my research assistant who coordinated the presence of group participants was also in the room. His prior interaction with participants made interviewees to receive his presence as non-threatening. His presence was necessary to assure me that all participants stayed in the room during the whole time of the discussion or to alert me of any interference.

Fifth, between the interview time and the time of agreement for it, I invited every participant in this research to fill out the background or demographic questionnaire.

Participants received the demographic data collection sheet along with the ground rules sheet. I urged them to read the sheets and become with them before the conversation time. Once a questionnaire was completed, my research assistant then scanned it to me before the appointed day for the phone focus group discussion. While the information gathered at this point served for the purpose of responding to my first research question, it also provided for a way assuring me of the willingness of specific focus group members to participate in the phone discussion.

Six, each focus group interview took an average of forty-five to seventy minutes. Each interview was recorded with the permission of the participants. Based on prior demographic questionnaires that were submitted to me, I was able to identify or confirm the presence of every participant that I expected with personal greetings after identifying each name with its voice. Following this check-in, I introduced the conversation as presented in the introduction note to the focus group discussion guiding questions (see Appendix J). Following Krueger and Casey's ground rules suggestion (3), I then proceeded to remind them of importance of following the ground rules that were sent with them prior to our meeting. At this point, I made sure everyone recalls those ground rules and had questions about them that needed to be answered before we continued. Then based on the information everyone submitted to me prior to our meeting, I did a roll call according to the last ground rule sent to them in order to make sure all expected members were present.

The background and demographic questionnaire towards pastors/leaders was introduced with the following words:

> This brief questionnaire was established as an introductory engagement with you in anticipation of our upcoming phone conversation. The overall

> goal of my research is to identify what role(s) urban evangelical churches in Bénin can play in the fight against the growing phenomenon of antisocial behaviors in our cities. Your pastor referred me to you as a volunteer who would like to participate in this conversation. In preparation to our conversation, I invite you to kindly answer these questions in order to allow me to arrive at good results that can profit the ministry of urban evangelical churches in their participation in eradicating this social problem. The information you will share with me will only serve the purpose of my study. I assure you of our commitment to confidentiality.

As already stated, the telephone focus group protocol encourages the researcher to send ground rules and guiding group discussion questions to participants ahead of time. The group discussion questions sheet sent to participants prior to the conversation time was introduced with these words:

> The following lines are the basic questions that we will be using during our phone group conversation. I am sending them to you in advance so that you can be familiar to them as the topics of our discussion on that day. You are encouraged to think about them ahead of them and prepare to give *your* responses or insights. As the ground rules say, there is not going to be right or wrong responses. I am interested in what you think, even if your ideas are different from your other participants'. Also be prepared to hear views or insights that may be completely different from your own. So you do not need to consult with one another in order to seek harmonious responses for me on that day. Just read through these questions and begin to think about what *you* are going to say about them.

The ground rules sheet, also sent ahead of time, was introduced with the following words:

> Please, take time to read these lines and become familiar with them. They constitute some rules that we are going to follow during our conversation in order for things to move as smooth as possible. Some of them relate to group conversation principles while others relate to the fact that I will be on the phone at a distant place and you will be together at another location. Following these rules will allow a very good conversation time.

At the time of the interview, the focus group interviews with participants were introduced with the following words:

> Thank you very much for accommodating your schedule to this phone conference. I designed this interview for the purpose of identifying what

> role(s) urban evangelical churches in Bénin can play in the fight against the growing phenomenon of antisocial behaviors in our cities. Your pastor was so gracious to give me the privilege to carry this conversation with you. Thank you very much for volunteering your time so that I can discuss the issue that this research wants to explore with you. So, with the permission of your pastor/leader and yours, I invite you to kindly participate in this conversation in order to allow us to arrive at good results that can profit the ministry of urban evangelical churches in their participation in eradicating this social problem. The information you will share with us will only serve the purpose of our study. I assure you of our commitment to confidentiality.
>
> Let me start with by asking if you read the ground rules and are now familiar with them. If you have any questions about the ground rule we can deal with them now so that our conversation will go as smooth as possible.

After data collection, this study discussed whether and how restorative justice coupled with African-integrated reconstruction theology offers the best way forward in responding to antisocial behavior in Bénin.

Controls

This research was controlled by my ability to determine which local congregations, in Cotonou and Porto-Novo, to take in account and which to ignore. The respondents were chosen because they meet the criteria of lead pastors, church leaders, church members, or have had experience with the criminal justice system. The choice of having a broad range of representation in the study (i.e., representation from different genders and socio-economic backgrounds) is also a controlling factor. As a condition of participation, each respondent agreed to the interview beforehand and a schedule was made within the range of their availability. All of the respondents interviewed were evangelicals in their faith profession.

Data Analysis

This research is based on a total of eight telephone focus group interviews, comprising of four interviews with pastors/leaders and church members in Cotonou and four interviews with pastors/leaders and church members in Porto-Novo. I conducted and transcribed all the eight interviews. The following steps were used in order to remain consistent with data interpretation and analysis.

Firstly, each interview was transcribed from the microcassette recorder with a word for word typewritten record.

Secondly, the interview findings were taken for each question and put into index cards, which then coded according to the research questions and put together for analysis at the completions of all the interviews.

Thirdly, each focus group was assigned a number in the order of the interviews. Hence, group #1 was the first group interviewed, and group # 8 was the last group interviewed. Index cards were used for each question and response and those responses were then separated according to the research question. With the research questions being two, two specific colors were affected, one for each research question, to interview questions pertaining to the research question. All the interview and questionnaires responses pertaining to research question one were colored in green and all those pertaining to research question two were colored in red.

Fourthly, two highlighters were used for more detail in underlining and exhibiting specific recurring or significant words and phrases. With the help of the index cards, the responses of the focus groups were put together in a row in order to sort out similarities and differences in the interviews.

With my research assistant, I reviewed all the data collected, commented on them, and, when needed, got suggestions from him to the formulation of the general summary of data. A Research Reflection Team later shared the same data for the same purpose as when it was shared with my research assistant. Conclusions were drawn for a better involvement of urban evangelical churches in the matter of the growing antisocial behavior occurrences in Cotonou and Porto-Novo and beyond.

Ethical Concerns

As promised to the participants in this research, the data collected for the purpose of this study was only shared within the Research and Reflection Team for analytical and evaluative purposes. No specific congregational or personal data was included in the information shared outside the team. While the original documents of the collection of data included names, locations, and denominational affiliation in order to evaluate data appropriately, only compiled data was preserved for dissertation writing purposes.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe current responses of evangelical congregations in Porto-Novo and Cotonou toward antisocial behaviors in the context of Bénin's failing criminal justice system. A careful consideration of literature pertaining to the presence of evangelicals in the geopolitical landscape of the Republic of Bénin shows the important place they now occupy in the country. The thrust of this study was to examine what their presence is in the context of escalation of antisocial behaviors and in the process to discuss a model for a stronger presence. Contemporary literatures in African theologies demonstrate that a true presence of the Church in contemporary Africa should be a presence for integrative reconstruction of life in all aspects. The conviction of African theologians of reconstruction is that "[t]he burden of reconstructing a positive image of Africa lies in the hands of African themselves" (Ndung'u 263). Mugambi also believes reconstruction lies in African hands:

> From the perspective of African Christianity, the paradigm of Reconstruction shifts responsibility from expatriate prompters and sponsors to local innovators and implementers. Like the community that takes full responsibility to rebuild the wall under Nehemiah's encouragement and leadership, Africans are encouraged by their metaphor of reconstruction to take their future into their own control, and reject the ideological propaganda which portrays them as helpless and hopeless individuals and communities. (*Christian Theology* 129)

This statement shows that theologians of reconstruction appeal to the importance of considering local ideas and resources in the process of reconstruction. This study sought to engage urban evangelical congregations in Cotonou and Porto-Novo in order to learn how they are currently responding to the ongoing crisis of antisocial behaviors and what

they anticipate doing more. Participants in this study altogether admit to the crisis, to the inefficiency of the Bénin criminal justice system or to its worsening of the crisis, to their overwhelming spiritual approach to responding with lack of social responses, and to their looking forward to implementing strategies that address the issue in a holistic manner. This study confirmed that by and large urban evangelical churches are inactive regarding the crisis and that for this reason something must change in order to bring about a more active evangelical witness in such a context.

Most participants' responses about what they anticipate doing that is not being done currently testify of the narrow way evangelical are currently present in both cities. Those actions, even amidst a robust emphasis on evangelism and spiritual care, include preventive social services, mediation/reconciliation works between offenders and victims, witnessing to criminal justice personnel, family counseling and education, and youth ministry works.

The Rationale of Reconstructive Justice

The reconstruction paradigm in African theological endeavors is an innovative and creative interfaith, interdenominational, and multidisciplinary approach to social transformation in the face of the baggage of postcolonial problems on the continent (Dèdji 38). It aims beyond a religio-cultural romantic discourse and yearns for values such as societal transformation, truthtelling, reconciliation, forgiveness, and repentance (7). This reconstruction approach is best alive with the practice of restorative justice when it deals with antisocial behaviors. Restorative justice is the counterpart of the widely accepted criminal justice, which focuses on inflicting pain, suffering, and even death to criminals who are enjoined to pay for their offenses. In restorative justice the

concern is for repairing the damages caused by the offense and a concern for ameliorating the conflict situation that produced the offense (Brunk 46). This approach is double-edged as it seeks to restore conflicted people and then creates a relational environment that prevents future occurrences of wrongdoing. In other words restorative justice builds a new justice where people live essentially because it seeks to bring satisfaction to the victim, the offender, and the larger community (47). This approach is appealing given the concerns raised in this work.

Profile of Participants

This study involved selected evangelicals in the urban settings of Cotonou and Porto-Novo who were willing to participate. I carried out interviews with focus groups of four to six evangelicals including their pastors who helped form those groups in their congregations. I met each focus group through telephone thanks to arrangements made by my research assistant who also helped distribute and collect the background and demographic questionnaires.

Age, Educational Background, and Gender

The average age of participants was 41. The oldest of these was 62 and the youngest 20. Participants came from a varied educational background. The least academically educated had no formal education while the highest holds a Ph.D. degree. Many have dual educational backgrounds such as those who have secondary school diplomas and Bible school diplomas. Five persons have had informal education including vocational training, four had Bible school or seminary education, five had graduate university degrees (including the Ph.D.), four had university undergraduate degrees, three had technical (professional high school) diplomas, and five had secondary school level

education in addition to informal education. Five of the participating pastors have had a formal ministerial education along with other four participating members who also have had Bible school or seminary education.

As far as participants' genders are concerned, males participated most often in this study. Altogether a total number of five females participated compared to thirty-four males. Among leaders and pastors, I was able to contact males as could be expected given popular evangelical theology that gives little encouragement to women leadership. However, a woman led one significant ministry relevant to this study. This situation reduced the number of female participation in this study rather than being based on my preference because I encouraged females' participation to the pastors whom I contacted. The feeble female participation may also be due to the fact that all the participating pastors were males.

Congregational Membership and Experience with Antisocial Behaviors

Focus groups' (FG) congregations range in membership from seventy at minimum to more than five hundred at maximum. Every participant in this study has been a member of his or her congregation for more than three years. This length of time in membership allowed for each participant to be able to speak about his or her congregation's witness amid antisocial behaviors. Some participants' memberships in their congregations date back to thirty years and more, some to twenty years or more, and still some to ten years or more with several in between. Those who spoke into this study have been well qualified to appreciate not only their congregation's current witness but also to make valid suggestions for the future.

Their qualification was also evident with the number of persons who have been directly affected by antisocial behaviors in the city. Every group interviewed belongs to a congregation that has existed for at least three years. The youngest congregation was three years old and the oldest was fifty-six years old. With this much time of existence in their neighborhood, virtually every group had one person affected by crime. Two FGs, namely # 2 and # 3, were composed of people who have all been affected personally. FGs # 1 and # 5 had all but one person affected, FG # 7 had one of their participants affected and FG # 8 had two members affected. This study then was based on a variety of FGs from the standpoint of their participants' experiences with antisocial behaviors. The variety was also perceived in terms of the distinct criminal events.

Denominational and Geographical Representations

Based on the principles established for the selection of congregations for this research, this study allowed as much information as possible about the evangelical witness in every area of the city. Not all congregations contacted for this research were finally considered for participation.

In Porto-Novo, my research assistant attempted to contact eleven congregations in total. Three of them were left out. One of these three, though having an evangelical outlook, was found to be rather a cult with complicated rules and regulations, which did not favor the research. Another congregation was left out due to the unavailability of its pastor to coordinate the process. The third congregation left out in Porto-Novo made it through the interview process. I found, through my research assistant, that the persons who were prepared ahead of time to participate were not the ones who spoke on the phone. Those who spoke with me on the phone were getting acquainted with the research

on the spot. As a result a lot of improvisations did not allow for good focus group discussion.

In Cotonou, twelve congregations were contacted initially and four of them have been left out. The pastor of the first congregation that was left out did not want to cooperate and directed my research assistant to a ministry led by a woman. The second congregation left out was the one led by the woman because after multiple missed appointments, only one person was attending the last appointment. The pastor of the third congregation left out said that his congregation was newly planted and was not yet two years old. I could not then find members who were at least in their third year of membership. The fourth congregation left out in Cotonou was due to the pastor's outright refusal to participate.

In the end, participating churches in this study came from different denominations and held membership in each of the three main evangelical associations of Bénin. I was able to interview four FGs from Cotonou and four FGs from Porto-Novo. In Cotonou, I had the Baptist church of Midombo and the Pentecostal church of Zogbo, both of which are affiliated respectively to the Union of Baptist Churches of Bénin,[13] and to the Pentecostal Church International, which are, in turn affiliated to the CEPEB. I had two Assemblies of God congregations from Tanzoun and Fidjrossè, from each city, affiliated to the Assemblies of God denomination, which is affiliated to FEMEB. The remaining congregations are indigenously initiated evangelical churches in Bénin, which are all but one affiliated to AMMEEB, the third body of evangelicals in Bénin. Churches that are affiliated to AMMEEB are (1) in Cotonou, the Ministry of Evangelisation, Worship, and

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[13] This Union is the Bénin daughter denomination to the U. S. Southern Baptist Convention.

Intercession (MELI) of Kowégbo, and (2) in Porto-Novo, the Ministry of Jesus International (MJI), the Embassy of God's People in Mission (APDM), and the International Ministry for the Restoration of the Evangel of Christ (MIREC).

These different churches were found in different areas of each city. In Cotonou, MELI is located in Kowégbo in the northeast area; the Assemblies of God congregation is located in Fidjrossè in the southwest area, and the Baptist congregation in Midombo in the east central area. In Porto-Novo, the Assemblies of God congregation is found in Tanzoun in the northern part of the city; the APDM congregation is in Dowa, the southern part of the city; the MJI is located in Agbokou in the northwest, and MIREC in Acron (also spelled Akron) is in the central part of the city.

Current Evangelical Responses to Antisocial Behaviors

The first research question explored evangelicals' own self-description of their involvement in Christian ministry in Porto-Novo and Cotonou in response to the public crisis of antisocial behaviors. The answer to this question was to be found in stages. The first stage was through a description of the ministries or ministers each congregation is carrying out, particularly as it pertains to responding to antisocial behaviors. The second stage was to discuss their awareness of or sensitivity to the escalating nature of antisocial behaviors. The third stage in answering this question was to have participating FGs share what practical actions their particular congregations and other evangelical bodies around them are taking in response to the issue. The following lines provide details on each stage in order to answer the first research question of this study.

Ministerial Outlook of Urban Congregations

Through this study, I was interested in knowing the outlook of ministry in each of the congregation represented by the FGs. The data received through the background and demographic questionnaire, was already informative. All of the congregations represented have a hierarchy of ordained ministry with no more than two ordained ministers in two of the congregations while the rest of the congregations have one ordained minister.

With a congregation size of one hundred and fifty to two hundred, FG #1 affirmed that MELI has two official ministers (no ordination) with twelve part-time ministers. FG # 2 affirms that the Assemblies of God congregation of Fidjrosse has one ordained minister and four volunteers with a congregation size of five to six hundred members. With a congregation size of three hundred to three hundred and fifty members, FG # 3 affirmed that the Assemblies of God of Atchoukpa has one ordained minister with twelve part-time ministers. With a congregation size of one hundred to one hundred and fifty members, FG # 4 affirms that Assembly of God's People in Mission congregation has two full-time ministers with four volunteers. FG # 5 affirms that Ministry of Jesus International has one full-time minister with four volunteers. FG # 6 and FG # 7 affirmed that the Pentecostal church of Zogbo (size five to six hundred) and MIREC (size one hundred and fifty to two hundred) each has one minister in addition to eight and nine volunteers respectively.

Research Question # 1: Evangelicals' Awareness of Antisocial Behaviors

At the level of the research question one, this study sought to understand what evangelicals' experience or knowledge of antisocial behaviors in the cities is. In order to

demonstrate awareness of antisocial behaviors in the cities, the participants shared stories as examples of countless other tales that evangelicals living in Cotonou and Porto-Novo are able to tell. The list of antisocial behaviors collected in this study can be put in three categories. As the Table 4.1 shows, category # 1 indicates a high level of antisocial behaviors. It consists of those violent occurrences that end with the systematic killing of human beings. Category #2 is middle level antisocial behaviors, which consists of those violent occurrences that are very hurtful but do not end up with killing. One can think of those that require urgent medical treatment or loss of substantive amounts of monies or belongings. Category # 3 is the lower level and consists of smaller thefts in the street or in the market place. One can think, for instance, of theft of small cash and cell phones. These incidents happen without any violence exerted upon the victim other than the taking away of his or her belongings or goods. The common feature of all these categories is that they are brought about a situation of two conflicting parties, namely, victim and offender.

The following figure is a summary of discussions with participants concerning their awareness of antisocial behaviors.

Table 4.1. Evangelicals' Awareness of Antisocial Behaviors

Categories[14]	Corresponding Words from Interviews[15]
High level antisocial behaviors	—Armed robberies and premeditated murders, "too many murders in this city," said a participating young man; —Animal and human sacrifices (children are often reported missing) by traditional religious leaders for religious rituals; and, —Systematic killings through poor driving caused by impatience and mutual insults between car and motorbike drivers.
Middle level antisocial behaviors	—Young girls raped by older men, even in some evangelical congregations by pastors (a woman in FG #1); —Ill treatment of Vidomègons[16] (a woman in FG # 5); —Domestic violence even in the church; women are mostly battered by husbands (a woman in FG # 6); and, —Gang passengers shooting Zémidjan drivers[17] by hiding weapons in loaves of bread; and, —Violent interpersonal fighting, siblings fighting each other seriously, sometimes leading to death.
Low level antisocial behaviors	—Theft with people's transportation taken away and thieves arrested, lynched, assaulted; —Swindling and fraud. Even the way some ministers deal with tithes and offerings in the Church reflects fraud; —Justice personnel working closely with gangs; —Prostitution particularly in the administrative area of the president house where young girls go about looking for sex clients (a woman in FG # 5); and, —House break-ins with thieves quickly arguing of their innocence.

[14] All categories in the tables of this study are my own ordering of participants' ideas.

[15] Corresponding words from interviews are my English translations of what participants shared with me. Words in these sections are ideas shared across all the groups that I met. When ideas are particular to a group or to a person, they are discussed in paragraphs separate from the tables.

[16] The practice of Vidomègon is an age-old interfamily approach to helping disadvantaged families in Dahomey-Bénin. It consists of wealthier couples taking poorer families' children into their families in order to care for those children until they grow up and become self-sufficient. In the new families, those children are called Vidomègon (a child living with someone else—other than his or her own parents) and are treated practically like other members of the host family. Many contemporary grown-ups have benefited from the practice before it has become corrupted in a way that some host families now seriously mistreat the Vidomègons.

[17] Zémidjan is the predominant public transportation system in Bénin consisting of motorbike drivers taking clients with no transportation who want to travel more or less distant places in exchange for money.

Some participants used personal real-life experiences to make their points. For instance in FG # 2 one man remembered a close relative who was killed in his long-time job of Zémidjan driving. In this case, his client requested him to be taken to a place that was also near the driver's own home. Because the night was late, the Zémidjan driver thought about returning home after dropping off that client. When on their way, he sensed that the client was moving something behind him. The Zémidjan driver assumed that it was the loaf of bread he saw with him in the beginning. Unfortunately, the driver was suddenly given a deadly shot at the back with the weapon that the client hid in the loaf of bread. The poor driver immediately lost conscience and his motorbike was taken away. Some pedestrians took him to the hospital where he was briefly treated before he died.

In FG # 6 a participant recalled that the very week he was married, armed robbers came into his house to take away all they have been given during the wedding ceremony. He still believes that those thieves, who have never been found, were people who certainly attended the wedding but had been taken over by greed. In FG # 5 a participant remembered that one day, on his way back from a temporary job that he was doing while studying at the university, he was approached by three apparently kind men who wanted his company. They presented themselves as newcomers in the city and wanted to know more about the area. Because they saw a digital camera with him, they started asking him if he would like them to take some pictures. He replied positively and they began taking pictures. At one point, when the camera reached one of the so-called newcomers, he took off running. The other two suddenly disappeared as well. He was so upset because his camera was very expensive. Some people directed him to the gang leaders of the area

through whom he finally took back his camera in exchange for a small amount of money that he gave to the gangs.

Causes of Antisocial Behaviors

The interviews also led some participants to point out some of the root causes of the escalation of antisocial behaviors. Discussions with participants led to categorizing the causes they are aware of in four categories: social, relational/family, educational, and psycho-spiritual. The social causes relate to society wide problems that participate in the maintenance and growth of antisocial behaviors in individuals' lives. The relational/family causes pertain to problems related to interpersonal relationship dysfunctions, particularly in the area of family. The educational causes point to forces that hinder children, youth, and adults to pursue their academic dreams. The psycho-spiritual causes are concerned with related to the state of individuals' spirits or souls. The following figure is a summary of their views in that regard.

Table 4.2. Causes of Antisocial Behaviors

Category	Cases
Social	—Famine, poverty, breaking down of social relatedness or interpersonal networks; —Unemployment rate getting higher causing graduates not to find work; even though they want to behave well, the unemployed are blocked by famine and poverty and become obliged to get involved in antisocial behaviors; and —High level of drunkenness.
Relational/family	—Some parents forsaking their children so that they grow up in the company of bad comrades or friends and finally give themselves over to delinquency; —Persons in dispute, not wanting to acknowledge their mistakes, thus aggrandizing small problems that could have been resolved; and, —People no longer have heart to care for, love, and do good to one another.
Educational	—Too many children who are not schooled or educated or will not be if nothing else is done; —The media, particularly television, spreading or encouraging antisocial behaviors through the kinds of programs or films they run; and, —Children dropping from schools for lack of money and joining gang groups.
Psycho-spiritual	—Impure desires and high level ambitions taking over people's will; —Fallen humanity given to sin and to the power of the evil one; and, —Invincible desires push people to commit crimes because even after a long time in prison.

As can be seen from Table 4.2, participants in this study have a wide range of explanations or awareness of the causes of antisocial behaviors in the cities. This awareness of multiplicity of causes forbids narrow answers that only address one side of the issue.

Research Question # 2: How Evangelicals Are Involved in Responding to Antisocial Behaviors

So far this study has established that Béninese evangelicals are highly aware of the issue of antisocial behaviors around them in the city. Plus, their awareness even communicates to them a multiplicity of causes for these behaviors. Through the second research question, this study attempted to know how Béninese evangelicals are currently involved in responding to the problem of which they are so aware. Before gathering the practical ways they are involved, participants shared about how they are affected by the problem of antisocial behaviors.

How Evangelical Are Affected by Antisocial Behaviors

I put in two categories the responses participating FGs gave in order to tell about how evangelical congregations are affected by antisocial behaviors. The first categories are those effects brought on evangelicals by outsiders, i.e., by non-Christians or non-evangelicals. The performances of antisocial behaviors by those outsiders affect evangelicals in ways such as the ones found in the above table. The second categories are those effects brought on evangelicals by performances of antisocial behaviors from within evangelical congregations, i.e., by certain church members and pastors. The commonality between both categories is that they are all negative effects on the life and witness of evangelicals in the cities. Table 4.3 accounts for the ways in which the lives of the congregations involved in this study are affected.

Table 4.3. How Evangelical Are Affected by Antisocial Behaviors

Category	Explanatory Words from the Interviews
Affected from Outside	—Most individual church members are seriously affected as victims; —Religiously motivated antisocial behaviors using ritualistic animal and human sacrifices have a negative spiritual influence (i.e., spiritual oppression) on the life and ministry of the church; —Some Christians seek to imitate unbelievers' responses and words (suing, cursing, and even popular lynching); —Christians who imitate worldly responses "become lukewarm and traditionalists instead of vibrant for the Lord in society" because they use their lips for sinful and unholy practices; —Some victims question God's love and presence in their lives: "Where was God and why has this happen to me and not another person" are types of questions that pastors are used to hearing from affected victims in their congregation; —Lack of peace during worship services, particularly evening worship services for fear that they could be assaulted on their way back home; or find homes vandalized; —Increasing numbers of young people are disinterested in the Gospel, some leave the church to join gang groups; others are not interested in attending evangelism rallies; —Irregular attendance of church activities due to prior experience with criminal events; and, —Churches and members' belongings are also stolen owing to some thieves or gangs who, pretending to be born-again Christians, attend worship services but with criminal purposes.
Affected from Within	—Some evangelical church members are also being found among the ranks of criminals. One case in point is a church member from one congregation (FG # 1) is now in prison; —Existence of antisocial behaviors in the church gives bad witness to the church and does not encourage members who would like to evangelize. One woman in FG # 1 said, "[W]e are even ashamed to be identified as evangelicals"; —Churches are also confronted with the sad reality of church-related swindling or fraud. Some church ministers are found to take government's micro-loan monies promising to channel them to the poor in their churches, but they never do so, thus abusing government's confidence in them[18] ; and, —Some antisocial behaviors also come from certain types of teachings in the circle of evangelicals. Some pastors teach that their members will be oppressed or demonized if they continue to live with their parents or siblings whom they suspect as sorcerers. Such teachings are causing terrible instances of separation from loved ones because of the fear of demonic attacks;

[18] Bénin is one of the beneficiaries of the U. S.'s Millennium Challenge Account program through which poor families are offered micro-credits in order to undertake small income-generating businesses, among other things. In Bénin, because the president is an evangelical with other evangelical leaders surrounding him, they have apparently put confidence in some evangelical pastors whom they charge to distribute those small loans to their congregants.

In addition to these negative assessments of the ways congregations are affected, some voices in this study spoke about the positive side of the issue. A male participant in FG # 1 remarked the protective outlook that some churches take in the context of uncontrollable antisocial behaviors:

> In spite of these negative impacts on the church, we must not overlook the fact that some people also run to church in order to seek prayers and refuge believing that they can be protected during their trips or in their businesses if pastors or church people pray for them. We thus pray that the Lord will make the person asking invisible to gangs or thieves. Most of them come back with testimonies of God's protection in their lives.

The pastor of FG # 6 observed that church members who are spared from the worst return thanks to God and grow in prayer life:

> Other believers are thankful when they have just been broken into or vandalized in the street without suffering deadly shots. Since they believe God protected them from the worst (often referring to such Psalms as 91:1ss; 11:5), this leads some church members to put their confidence in the Lord more for their continuing protection. They thus become more fervent in praying for themselves, their family members and also in the ministry of intercession on behalf of gangs or thieves for their repentance.

These two unique remarks during the interviews came at times when all other participants were too focused on how disturbing antisocial behaviors are to the evangelical ministry in both cities.

How Evangelicals Are Involved in Responding to Antisocial Behaviors

This study discovered that with such a high level of consciousness in addition to being personally affected in serious manners, evangelicals' responses do not measure up to the level of the issue. While they cannot be said to be doing nothing, their responses to the situation is rather inconsistent with the extent of the issue. Responses received from participants have been ordered into five categories: Spiritual, Internal Education and Care, Prison Ministry, and No Special Concern. The spiritual category of response is

comprised of prayers (for church and members), intercessions (for authorities), and regular church activities such spiritual teaching, preaching, and evangelism. Within the internal education and care are elements such as educating and reminding church members about protective measures, caring for victims, and securely locking church members. Prison ministry consists of visiting prisons on a periodic basis and during special occasions such Christmas, and the category of no concern refers to churches within which the issue is not discussed at all and where the concern for social problems goes from little to nothing. Table 4.4 accounts for the essential evangelical responses collected during this study.

Table 4.4. Responses to Antisocial Behaviors

Category	Corresponding Words from the Interviews
Spiritual	—Pray for protection of church materials, for everything in detail as if they have been spiritually asleep all along, and for unbelievers and gangs; —Intercessory prayers for country's authorities during regular worship services asking that the Lord would touch the heart of the country's criminal justice authorities to arrive at better ways to handle the issue and to implement them; —Spiritual teachings seeking to address practical social issues such as famine, poverty, and suffering; thus communicates hope to impoverished church members. Teachings address how to live through hard times, and how to counter evil thoughts when going through these times. —Teaching or preaching nonviolence, non-retaliation, forgiveness, and love toward all so that these teachings would allow church member to be salt and light in all areas of society, in government, in parliament, and in other societal structures; and, —Regular church activities (e.g., preaching, evangelism) to strengthen believers and convert unbelievers.

Internal Education and Care	—Refer to the Bible in order to enforce clear discipline in order to discourage members' antisocial behaviors from their midst; it also allows the watching world to understand their clear message of disapproval; —Exhort church members so they can understand that sin must not reign in their lives; —Regular visits to church members who are victims in order to offer pastoral care and counseling. This is believed to allow those church members to come back to church they get over their hurts. —Make sure church buildings and other are securely locked; —Hire police officers during special events in order to scare thugs away; and, —Being watchful of any suspects' activities and quickly report
Prison Ministry	—Seasonal visits to prisoners through which churches offer prisoners gifts (e.g., food, clothes, family pictures), clean their dwelling places, preach, and follow these actions by offering them Bibles or New Testaments.
No Special Concern	—Most churches do not discuss the rise of antisocial behaviors. Evangelical congregations in particular are socially weak and their impact on society is scarce; and, —The church is no longer the light of the world like John Wesley and the early Methodist movement had been for England.[19] In this country, evangelicals are rather copying the world's methods of responding to these issues.

The most common responses found across the board were prayers (for victims, for offenders to repent, for authority to do better work), church members' education to help them avoid being involved in antisocial behaviors, seasonal visits to prisoners, and prudential caring for congregational belongings (closing doors, cautiousness toward strangers and even toward those who claim newfound faith). One distinctive response found among participating congregations came from FG # 4. The congregation represented by this group is known not only for visiting prisoners as usual but also for getting connected to prisoners' families, their victims, and their victims' families for the purpose of mending relationships among all of them. They hope that in the process they

[19] The pastor whose intervention communicated this point is a well known former Methodist revivalist and a personal friend who separated himself from the Methodist Church of Bénin in order to preserve true evangelical witness in his ministry after failed attempts at renewing the church, one can understand that he mentions the story of John Wesley.

will bring offenders to remorse and repentance and to encourage the victims to annul the legal process.

Perhaps one reason that keeps congregations in the mood of seasonal prison ministry is the fact that they get some positive results leading to some conversions out of that experience. It is the case of participants in FG # 2 who had a vivid testimony of a former prisoner who now worships with them as a result of this kind of ministry. While they are not doing enough at the present, some churches plan for greater ministry intervention such as creating a school and a health clinic based on the understanding that building up children and youth now is better than to having to repair them later when they have gone awry. For the time being, they focus on constantly checking and closing church doors and windows in order to avoid criminals' misfortune. Another congregation has in place a distinctive NGO through which they envision providing an avenue for caring for victims, encouraging young men's and women's education, and also giving spiritual teaching. With the exception of one pastor, no one reported specific evangelical contacts with organized gang groups. The only pastor doing something in that regard was the pastor of FG # 5, who also admitted its difficulty because while building a close relationship with two gangs in his neighborhood, other colleagues (i.e., pastors) are critical about that work. They cannot accept that he is befriending gangs of thugs.

I asked every group a nonscientific estimate of evangelical congregations involved in responding to antisocial behaviors in their geographical area in order to inquire about their views of other evangelicals in the city. With the exception of FGs # 3 and # 4 representing congregations that are somewhat involved in doing some work outside of their congregations, all the responses pointed to one congregation. Only those

two FGs spoke about two congregations, including their own congregations and a special ministry, also referred to by those who evoked one congregation, called Mount Horeb International Foundation (MHIF) founded and led by Janine Aho, a woman and former influential Southern Baptist who claims to be a prophet of God for spiritual and social restoration.[20] All the FGs interviewed, including the Southern Baptists, agreed that MHIF is doing an exceptional positive ministry that other evangelicals in general are neglecting. Participants gave answers that ranged from 3 to 10 percent when estimating the number of evangelical congregations responding to the situation by at least visiting prisons. The pastor in FG # 5 concluded this part with a self and general evaluation of evangelicals:

> In general, evangelical churches are not active in the field responding to antisocial behaviors as Catholics and Methodists are (prison visitation, share foods, clothing, etc). There is also the fact that most Evangelicals by large lack in resources in order to offset the costs of their social projects compared to other bodies (again referring to Catholics and Methodists), which get monies from their mother churches abroad.

The irony with the last part of this statement is that whereas some evangelical churches are linked with foreign mission agencies such as the Assemblies of God and the Baptists congregations they are not doing something special other than seasonal visits to prisons. Nevertheless, the works of MHIF appreciated by all is distinctly an indigenous initiative and is known to be far above the ones carried out by all other church bodies.

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[20] Contrary to self-proclaimed African prophets who have been seen as uneducated, Janine Aho is a well-educated woman. According to her biography posted on her ministry's Web site, she is a graduate from the department of Economy Sciences of the National University of Bénin, has studied banking and finance in France, has earned an MBA in the United States, and has also held a high ranking position at the Société Béninoise d'Electricité et d'Eau (SBEE), the Bénin company of water and electricity. She was working as the Administrative and Finance director of Compagnie Béninoise de Navigation Maritime (COBENAM), the Bénin Maritime Navigation Company, when she believed the Lord called her to quit and go into ministry ("Biographie").

Prospect for Evangelical Contribution

A distinctive evangelical contribution in the matter of antisocial behaviors would stem from a certain way of perceiving or judging the official system for responding to antisocial behaviors. Only by appreciating the strengths and the weaknesses of that system can evangelical know better what unique contributions to make.

Research Question # 3: Evangelicals' Evaluation of Bénin's Criminal Justice System

Asked about their comments on the Béninese criminal justice system, Béninese evangelicals believe that the system is characterized by: inequality, systemic corruption, powerlessness, and inefficiency. Inequality refers to unequal treatments of rich and poor. Systemic corruption refers to the fact that the whole justice system encourages the corruption of judges and other law enforcement officers. Powerlessness refers to the fact that, while it pretends to correct offenders, the system is unable to change behaviors. Inefficiency refers to the reality that not only the system does not change, but it also increases antisocial behaviors in antisocial persons. Inefficiency also refers to the fact that the system does not address other urban issues that are important for the fight against antisocial behaviors. Table 4.5 shows the essential of evangelicals' evaluation of the characteristics of Béninese criminal justice system.

Table 4.5. Evangelicals' Evaluation of Béninese Justice System

Category	Corresponding Words from Interviews
Inequality	—Several innocent persons are kept in prison for a long time before they are finally judged to not be guilty; One case in point was an instance when one relative of a participant had been unjustly kept in prison, having been falsely included in a crime by the true offender, until the day when the real criminal announced his friend's innocence. Then was he released; —"[T]he proper name for the system ought to be 'criminal injustice system' because many persons are imprisoned unjustly and hearing their narratives will quickly convince one about the wickedness that pervades our justice system" (pastor of FG #6); and, —There are instances where some judgments color political or people group affiliations.
Systemic Corruption	—In many cases true offenders are not judged and punished as long as they have money and can get by, whereas innocent persons can be punished or poor offenders punished at a higher proportion; —Citizens are not satisfied with criminal justice's answers; its administration is very slow. In the process, high level of corruption does not allow fair sentencing; and, —Most evangelicals believe that the justice system is so corrupt that prayers and trust in God are better ways of getting justice than is usually expected from the criminal justice system.
Powerlessness	—Instead of correcting and freeing persons from bad behaviors, it rather increases those behaviors in people; —People do not expect justice from the justice system anymore, hence the rise of popular lynching, which is also a sort of crime due to the mishandling of criminality by the justice system; and, —The fact that security is not well handled in the city and prisoners are made better criminals once in the justice system is also an open door for antisocial behaviors.
Insufficiency	—The criminal justice only works with retributive strategies, imprisons offenders, and then releases them shortly after. During their short stay in prison, they learn better strategies for performing antisocial behaviors from other inmates; —Bénin government needs to reinforce border security measures in order not to allow Nigerian gangs to come into Bénin in order to corrupt the young people; —Poverty encourages corruption because people are looking for easy ways to solve their problems; and, —Bénin cities are becoming overcrowded. Cotonou, in particularly is a small place but it has an overwhelming number of persons living there. Territorial administrative reorganization is crucial and justice system needs to encourage that instead of leaving everybody in this condition and seeking to punish culprits later.

The first comment from FG # 1 deserves a direct quote and an explanation because I heard several similar comments from other FGs: "We cannot have confidence in our justice system given what is happening on the ground; justice personnel work with drug dealers to swindle money from innocent wealthy persons." The story is an experience that took place in the neighborhood of the church of FG #1. Some drug dealers who are also armed robbers are now disarmed and under scrutiny by the population and the police. However, certain police officers used to benefit from those armed robbers' crimes through corruption. Now that their network is under watch, they have changed their strategies of operation. Now they throw significant among of illegal drugs in the homes of wealthy people who are not drug dealers. Policemen suddenly awakened a relative of one of the participants of FG#1, a wealthy person, one morning. The police officers began asking him the drugs they said he had. They told him that they got reports that his wealth is a result of illegal drug business and that his home has been reported as possessing drugs. Totally dismayed, he responded that he had never dealt with illegal drugs. Asked if he would allow a complete check of his house, the man answered affirmatively. Then the police went ahead and after a few minutes they found a bag of drugs in his house. In the face of strong denial by the man, the police officers advised him that the only thing he could do in order to avoid the shame and suffering of imprisonment was to give them 500,000 FCFA (about $1,200.00). Fearing that his normal business will slow down and not wanting to suffer disgrace, and, of course, because he is wealthy had the money, he gave them the money they asked for.

In FG # 3 an elderly man who has had experiences with crimes made the following statement:

> Criminal justice authorities are not efficient in their work. For instance after what happened to me in 1979, they did not do much to the point that criminals found a better way to come back a second time. But in that second time, they came very armed and we barely survived. Finally, my family and I were obliged to leave our newly built home in the area in order to return to our extended family place. These kinds of instances have led us into a situation whereby many thieves are systematically killed by angry mobs. For instance, on a one single day here in Tanzoun three thieves were lynched. This sort of thing angers gang groups and they come back harder and the population in turn replies harder and the violence continues to escalate. Our authorities must think deeply about what to do, and this cannot be resolved with a three-day seminar that does not deliver much, as is now their custom.

This is a sorry evaluation based on personal facts, which make it difficult to argue, based on abstractions, about the goodness of the criminal justice system. Persons with real experiences like these will hardly hear.

Prisoners who leave incarceration nourish the desire of going back to prison again. A participant in FG # 2 commented on this aspect with a practical suggestion:

> At my workplace there is a guy who just came from prison after ten years of incarceration. He always says that he is now well prepared for bigger achievement, implying that he was less prepared ten years ago when he was having his first experiences in criminality. It is preferable that our justice authorities review the way they handle criminals so they don't come back in society better prepared to disturb our peace. It is advisable that they keep them indefinitely in prison and help them succeed in small businesses over there. There is a case of an imprisoned woman who continues to sew and make artistic things and thus continues to earn money. All veteran prisoners can do likewise instead of being sent back into society after spending time learning how to better their criminal activities.

One troubling story from FG # 7 was told at this point. A businessman who became involved in some kind of cult killed his daughter for ritual purposes. Apprehended by security forces, he was sentenced for five years imprisonment. After six month he was already out doing his businesses as usual. Unable to bear his presence, his wife left him and finally divorced him. The pastor of FG # 7 commented on this case:

> Normal Christians know that there is no justice in this world's justice system, which is naturally sold to money. Because the system is sold to money, it makes it possible for many people to get away with their crimes as long as they have money to dump on the system's personnel. We have several well-known criminals who have not been sentenced or who, even though sentenced, are going around freely. However, poor people, even those who are innocent, are imprisoned and treated harshly.

Statements like these, hardly invented, call for the importance of taking seriously the prophetic calling of the Church mirrored after the metaphors of Amos and Hosea and the sacrificial devotion of the Lukan Christ for the freedom of the poor and oppressed.

A man in FG # 2 commented on the efficiency of prayer versus the powerlessness of the justice system with a personal story. His house was broken into and his property stolen by unknown gangs. Then against friends' advice he decided not to use the justice system, given what he knows about officials. Because the pressure was so great even from church members he decided to go through the system. To his surprise he discovered that the personnel wanted him to give them a bribe before they would touch the case. He finally left and withdrew his case. Then he resorted to intense prayer asking God to show forth his justice. One morning he was called by a friend who wanted him to show up quickly at a certain place. Once he reached there he saw his TV, radio, and other items ready to be sold. With the papers for his property that he still had, he was able to recover everything, and in the end he called on everyone present to trust in God's justice. The thief followed him that day to his home inquiring about his faith and decided to begin attending that man's church. They are now in the same Assemblies of God congregation.

Evangelicals who visit prisons acknowledge that these places are like hell. The place is seriously dirty. Many inmates have no clothes, no food, no drink, no place to sleep, and some inmates spend all nights standing still or sitting on one another. Almost

every inmate becomes thinner while in prison as one compares their pictures prior to coming to prison and the way they now look. Many evangelicals acknowledge that the work of incarceration personnel is very sad. Though people might have broken the law, they ought to be given at least food and clothing.

More sympathetic analyses about the criminal justice came from FG # 8 when someone, having heard another critical analysis, argued that all is not bad with the system:

> I would not say that our criminal justice system is not doing its work. There are good texts and mechanisms that need to be enforced and, if done well, will provide justice. All is not bad. The problem comes only during the application process. The system then encounters the evil of corruption but also the lack of resources including human resources capable of handling all the existing cases in the system.

This participant clearly thinks that the existing criminal laws of Bénin could provide justice if they are handled well (i.e., without corruption and with enough personnel). A similar reply came from another participant in FG # 6:

> The government is making a good effort by building some additional bodies of security forces in addition to the traditional ones that we have. But the problem is due to the fact that we are close to Nigeria, which makes it easy for criminals from there to seek shelter with us here and criminals from here to run quickly to Nigeria to seek refuge once they have committed a crime. This renders the task very difficult for security personnel. Also, the death penalty has been cancelled in Bénin, and popular lynching is normally illegal. For these reasons, thieves find some glory in the new measure and do not fear the few months that they have to spend in prison in the event that they are caught. Because of the 'no death penalty and no popular lynching' measures, some Nigerian criminals run into Benin as well because they know they won't normally be lynched. This situation facilitates a kind of fellowship between advanced gangs in Nigeria with ours and makes them stronger.

While regretting the influence Nigerian gangs have on the evolution of criminality in Bénin, this participant also seems to regret the current law against death penalty.

In spite of these unique voices, I realized a kind of consensus about the inadequate work the Bénin criminal justice system is doing given the situation. All participants with practical cases in support share the problems within the criminal justice system for the most part. Even those who are sympathetic to the system still acknowledged that in spite of the existing good texts of law corruption and lack of resources make the challenges difficult. In such a context, the study sought to learn participants' suggestions regarding methods and ways with which evangelicals can seek justice and reconciliation between victims and offenders.

Research Question # 4: Ways to Become More Active in Responding to Antisocial Behaviors

Having laid out the inefficiencies of the Bénin criminal justice system, participants made suggestions that aim at better working for justice between victims and offenders.

Suggestions made to facilitate justice and reconciliation between offenders and victims address the following: the reality of injustice in the criminal justice system, the spiritual problem within offenders, the need for victims' caregiving, the necessity of helping victims forgive the unlovable, the general social crisis of poverty, unemployment and broken relationships, and the importance of mending victims' and offenders' relationships along with other persons in their networks (see Appendix L).

As encouraged by this study, some participants expressed differing methods of responding to antisocial behaviors. Some participants, in contradiction to those suggest that the justice be run by Christians only as a method, suggest that evangelicals cannot expect the whole system to be run by Christians. They argue that when society reaches

that point, most people in the country would have become Christians and crime itself would have stopped. For them, gangs themselves know that world systems do not have a solution. In consequence, Christians can aid by engaging in social works (e.g., creating maternal, primary, and high schools, health clinics, vocational training centers) where nonbelievers can be provided with wholistic care. Evangelicals need not to wait until the whole system is filled with Christians. Another participant, probably because of his professional background, observed that evangelical Christians have only one radio station in the whole country, which also is having difficulty progressing. Knowing that they can reach more people with a one-hour program than Paul ever reached in his entire ministry and that gangs oftentimes do listen to radios, he suggested that evangelicals need to invest in this strategy (suggested by a professional radio broadcaster).

Other evangelicals, in response to those who suggested the idea of reconciling victims and offenders, thought that to accept living again with someone who has wronged you with some deep offenses such as stabbing or taking the life of a loved one that you are not going to have back is very difficult. According to these participants, the only valid way to deal with those people is to keep them away somewhere in prison. One woman (from FG #1) in this category thinks that in cases of murder normally they deserve to be killed. Currently, Bénin society is trying to see how to deal with murderers and have recently cancelled capital punishment but results are not yet satisfying. One elderly participant recalled former traditio, when crime required issues being brought into public places (called *Avato*) where both parties meet village and family elders. The issues are tackled together in all possible dimensions ending with both parties reconciling with one

that point, most people in the country would have become Christians and crime itself would have stopped. For them, gangs themselves know that world systems do not have a solution. In consequence, Christians can aid by engaging in social works (e.g., creating maternal, primary, and high schools, health clinics, vocational training centers) where nonbelievers can be provided with wholistic care. Evangelicals need not to wait until the whole system is filled with Christians. Another participants, probably because of his professional background, suggested that evangelical Christians have only one radio station in the whole country, which also is having difficulty progressing. Knowing that they can reach more people with a one-hour program than Paul ever reached in his entire ministry and that gangs oftentimes do listen to radios, evangelicals need to invest in this strategy (suggested by a professional radio broadcaster).

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another (*don dokpo*), including their extended families. Who was at fault was not the point; the goal was *don dokpo*.

Reconciliation, in such practice, was symbolized by pouring water on the floor meaning that when crime happened heat was present in the village, in interpersonal relationships, and also in the whole environment. Through reconciliation, the whole community has regained freshness again, and the heat on the ground is now replaced by a new freshness, which is symbolized by pouring water on the ground. The current criminal justice system does not deliver freshness in heated relationships. Maybe, the elderly man believes, evangelicals can find something useful in the way we used to handle crime situations (the 62 year old man from FG # 3). Another whose professional background informed his suggestion was a social work. For him, a good evangelical procedure in a case of crime would be to inquire why an offender committed a crime, what is happening with his soul and social life in order to formulate an adequate response. Listening to the victims in order to learn what they feel in order to respond to their needs is crucial. Listening would necessarily lead to psychological and spiritual caregiving for both victims and offenders and also facilitate meetings between both parties so they can listen to one another and explore the causes of the crime. The offender would speak about what led him or her to that point and the feelings he or she was having while offending. The victim will also respond with sharing feelings he or she had when the crime occurred and his or her present feeling. In this process both parties will be helped to find the way forward (largely by a professional social worker from FG # 4).

Specific Ministries Envisioned

Given the magnitude of the tasks as revealed by the discussion, I proceeded to ask each participant where their church or evangelicals in general could start doing something in response to antisocial behaviors. The ministries they mentioned are here ordered in four categories: social, relational/family, educational, and psycho-spiritual. These ministries match the causes of antisocial behaviors they mentioned and are in response to these factors. Table 4.6 accounts for the kinds of actions participating evangelicals thought they and others like them could be doing.

Table 4.6. Specific Ministries Envisioned

Category	Corresponding Words from Interviews
Social	—Engage society in a way that Lord will touch both criminals and corrupt leaders and transform them; —Engage the justice system so that it will no longer have the deficiencies it now has; —Develop different social works in favor of the socially disadvantaged persons; —Organize seminars and discussion times with justice personnel particularly during their sabbatical periods; —Direct ministry toward those who are sick and forgotten instead of focusing only on the ones who are socially okay. For this reason, "our congregation must go into the desperate areas of the city and do ministry there" (a male participant in FG # 4); —Offering jobs and also teaching people to be creative in order to invent new jobs; and, —Create an NGO through which to herald Christian solutions to common problems in public settings and help people live out these great values we have been given in Christ.
Relational or Family	—Pay attention to family matters and provide adequate helps for strong family relationships; —Review evangelism strategies in order to target specific groups with whom to build relationship instead of the mass evangelism most evangelicals have always used; —Build relationships with neighborhood schools and love the kids through gift giving (to best students); introduce surprising events that will make students and teachers wonder why Christians are that interested in them, and in the process present the gospel and disciple them; and, —Select other places of ministry by taking into account areas that are well-known for criminal activities and live there with the inhabitants; equip ministers as to how to conduct ministry in such places in a specific manner according to the needs of that place is necessary.

Educational	—Invest in schooling/education, thus training sound and valid primary and secondary school teachers who will teach our children and youth with good morality for the sake of a better future; —Invest in children who are out of school because of lack of financial resources; and —Organize activities that will incite children and youth to take academic education seriously.
Psycho-Spiritual	—Social works that will allow for ex-prisoners' social reintegration and in the process we will present them the Gospel for their spiritual reinsertion, thus keeping them out of criminality; —Create a center of radical hospitality where juvenile criminals or at-risk youth can be welcomed and introduced to the love of God. In that place, whole families can be cared for according to their needs. —Evangelicals are to think about re-inventing ministry in a way that evangelization, caregiving, and counseling will go hand in hand; and, —Initiate a ministry of reconciliation of victims and offenders as Christ's ambassadors.

One reality pertaining to group dynamic was at play at his level when some evangelicals expressed their opinion that the issue is so crucial and complex that there is no need to look for a quick fix that might take place in two, three, or four years from now. A solid turn around, they believe, can be expected in twenty-five years from now. These participants, therefore, doubt that it will be efficient to continue to focus on today's corrupt leaders and the justice system they are spearheading. They are the ones who think that a well-spent energy in that regard will focus on tomorrow's leaders, that is, today's youth and children.

Contrary to the previous suggestion, another category of evangelicals believe that they must engage society today because the Lord is able to touch those who are likely seen as difficult to change (i.e., the criminals and corrupt leaders). Whether thought in terms of long-term or short-term, the good news is that a large consensus was obvious that evangelicals need to experience a paradigm shift in the way they serve the Lord in our society. Perhaps such a paradigm shift happened with one pastor who, during our discussion, insisted on the spiritual approach while his church members were broader in their vision. Suddenly at the end of the discussion, he said in his last words, "I understand

that there are certain aspects of ministry that we do not often think about such as those pertaining to social issues. By providing those services we can recuperate many that are lost. The mission of the church is more than evangelism; we must go further" (the pastor of FG # 1).

The extent of what is at stake led some participants to suggest that, evangelical churches must stop working on their own and embrace each other for the common purpose because such a vision is so big that one congregation may not be able work on it alone. A sort of evangelical ecumenical front is needed in order to tackle current problems. Sadly, evangelical bodies have become politically and denominationally driven and oftentimes regional and ethnical partisans.

Contrary to the above statement, an elder of FG # 3 was unhappy with suggestions that want to have the church more involved in the area of antisocial behaviors:

> The church is already doing its part. It beckons on our justice authorities to step up and do their job well. But if an evangelical NGO would do para-juridical works, it must be credible and be well represented by lawyers in order to deserve some hearing in societies. It will thus be capable of opening channels for evangelical pastors to teach and lead people into godly living. For instance as a simple church we are not able to gather justice authorities for seminars or that sort of thing but a credible evangelical NGO could.

The concern in this elder is not that Christians must not be involved but that they need to be involved under the umbrella of something else, here an NGO, other than as church.

The desire to do something different was found in all groups participating in this research. Churches represented by participating groups are already focused on spiritual teaching, mostly inside their church walls and a few of them in prisons. Through these

interviews, one notices a general desire to go beyond their churches and engage the society at large, including the criminal justice itself.

Summary of Interviews

In anticipation to this study's in-depth discussion of the findings in Chapter 5, the following summarizes the interview findings.

Discovery # 1

Béninese evangelicals are both aware of and seriously affected by the escalating crisis of antisocial behaviors but remain largely inactive in their response to it.

Evangelicals in Bénin are very much aware of and concerned about the current occurrence of antisocial behaviors in both cities. Their concern is so clearly expressed in the way they describe the phenomenon and become clearer when they share their own experiences or the experiences of loved ones. Most of the people of the congregations involved in this study have been personally affected, and the resulting fear among church members causes a heavy burden on members' commitment to church's activities and on their pastors' or leaders' ministries as well.

Discovery # 2

Béninese evangelicals affirm the ineffectiveness, incompleteness, and danger of the Béninese criminal justice system with regard to urban antisocial behaviors.

None of the groups advanced a singular spiritualization of the causes of the antisocial behaviors. They either directly expressed socio-spiritual causes or suggested socio-spiritual responses to the issue. Even strong emphases on the spiritual elements have not precluded their concerns for people's socio-relational well-being. Ironically very few of the churches are currently undertaking such a holistic approach to their ministry in

the cities. Most of the ministry works in evangelical congregations are structured around a model that does not really address social issues beyond those congregations. All but two congregations represented in this study have ingrown or spiritual outreach practices only. The good side of this discovery, however, is that they acknowledge this reality by distinguishing another woman-led ministry located in Cotonou from what their congregations are doing.

Discovery # 3

Béninese evangelicals affirm that Christian justice seeking must go beyond the criminal justice process and serve to reconcile victims and offenders through the use of Scripture-based para-judicial processes.

Evangelicals' assessment or evaluation of Bénin's criminal justice system is overwhelmingly negative. The system is not that of justice at all, they confirmed. Even participants with sympathetic assessment of the system, in the end, do acknowledge serious deficiencies. The system is rather adding to people's plight. Some participants hope that the system may be transformed through more Christians infiltrating it with a different vision; others think evangelicals need to work in the society without the system. Suggestions for facilitating reconciliation between victims and offenders included a call to work for correct criminal justice procedures, independent Christian para-judicial services such as mediation and reconciliation ministries, and socioeconomic initiatives.

Chapter 5 focuses on analyzing these findings and discusses theological and ministerial implications based on the theoretical perspective arrived at the end of Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

At the dawn of the 1990s, almost all citizens of the Republic of Bénin exclaimed with joy over the newfound democracy as a haven for peace, tranquility, and freedom. The sociopolitical developments that came about afterward have not confirmed that dream to many. This reality is evidenced by this study that examined real-life experiences with the growing phenomenon of urban antisocial behaviors. The accumulated experience with Bénin sociopolitical leaders working in the area of criminal justice has proven to be unsatisfying. Herein comes the importance of taking the new reconstruction role that the church must assume through its presence in such a context.

While the position of marginality could describe evangelicals in Bénin before the 1990s, emergence at the center would best qualify current evangelicals' experience in the sociopolitical scene. Contrary to liminality as the common Western Christianity experience, the role, status, and sequence-sets of evangelicals in Bénin have now been radically changed, not to the point where they have become invisible as in marginality (Roxburgh 24), but to the point of becoming more visible in the public scene. In such a context, the Church must not assumed the marginal role its western counterpart is forced to assume as this latter shifted, coming from Christendom, to a private and individualistic center due to the forces of modernity (8). The risk, however, is obvious.

The purpose of this study was to describe current responses of evangelical congregations in Porto-Novo and Cotonou toward antisocial behaviors in the context of Bénin's failing criminal justice system. Roman Catholic missionary Patrick Claffey, in a

magnificent analysis based on ethnographic data in Bénin churches, critiqued both his own Catholic Church's social engagement with society in Bénin and also that of the evangelicals and charismatics:

> While my critique of the [Roman] Catholic social teaching was that it tended to maintain an ivory-tower distance from social reality, charismatic preachers appear to building castles in the air while failing to engage with the struggles of the people on the ground. Making promises of *miracles* and *breakthroughs* [original emphasis] that defy all logic while failing to engage in any concrete way with state and society. (248)

Claffey thus makes an important assertion noticing the failure not only of the Roman Catholic Church but of all others mainline denominations whose social discourses remain at a great distance from people's realities on the ground. He also points to the failure of Béninese evangelical charismatics to engage with social realities. These failuresdo not preclude Béninese evangelicals' capacities for dreaming about a better reconstructive engagement with society.

Major Findings

Three major discoveries came out of the interviews and research data analysis of this study. These major findings portray both current and anticipated witnesses of Béninese evangelicals in the context of antisocial behaviors. These characteristics are shared across the spectrums of Béninese evangelicalism as represented in this study.

Discovery #1

Béninese evangelicals are both aware of and seriously affected by the escalating crisis of antisocial behaviors but remain largely inactive in their response to it.

Virtually nobody is unaware about the escalating issue of antisocial behaviors in Bénin in general, and in Cotonou and Porto-Novo in particular. The apparent inaction on the part of evangelicals, as I assumed from the beginning of this study, led me to verify whether

those who stand for the gospel of Christ in Bénin are really aware and affected at all by the plethora of antisocial behaviors incident present in both cities. In the process, I soon confirmed that they all are, not just as remote incidents happening to others, but a crucial problem affecting their very lives. As the interview findings show, evangelicals are affected in two directions, namely, as victims by and large and increasingly as offenders because certain members and ministers who are now being found in those behaviors. The widely held evangelical response to the situation is also threefold: spirituality, prudence, and regular church routines.

All participants share in prayer as a response to the situation. During regular worship services, they include prayers for offenders' repentance, victims' consolation, and for those in authority to lead the nation well. Another type of response consists in prudential use of church spaces so as not to allow thieves to break in and steal church belongings. Included among church routines are regular evangelism programs, visits to prisoners, and worship services. Nevertheless, as one woman in FG # 1 said, evangelicals are used to mass evangelism with little results, so that the mention of evangelism as regular discipline cannot be the same as the one needed in response to antisocial behaviors. It is rather characteristic of what Harvie M. Conn describes: "On the street corners of the world's inner cities the evangelical too often has been standing, singing, 'Take the world and give me Jesus.' And now we have what we asked for. We have Jesus and the world has been taken away from us" (38). Becoming active in the context of antisocial behavior will cause evangelicals in Bénin to move beyond current churchly routines and take their place in the city as God's change agents. This involvement

becomes even more urgent given their description of the Béninese criminal justice system.

Discovery #2

Béninese evangelicals affirm the ineffectiveness, incompleteness, and danger of the Béninese criminal justice system with regard to urban antisocial behaviors.

Participants have regularly attested, based on real cases, that Béninese criminal justice, in its dealing with crimes, is impartial, compromised, unjust *vis-à-vis* the poor, and incapable of really correcting those its purports to correct. The dangerous aspect of this overall evaluation is the consequence of the system's incapacity to satisfy Béninese. Given that Béninese have lost confidence in the system, many prefer to seek justice on their own by taking the route of popular lynching of thieves. Participants in this study said that certain evangelicals would join in this way of seeking justice while others reject it and resort instead to praying for God's justice to prevail. These two main attitudes from Bénin evangelicals are unhelpful insofar as God's way of remaking or reconstructing society is to use the witness of the church.

Mugambi helpfully suggests four reasons that may explain African evangelicals' indifference toward social desegregation (*Christian Theology* 102-03). Firstly, beginning from the colonial era throughout the democratic era, African churches have not been taught in a way that causes them to have an interest in sociopolitical actions. This may explain Béninese evangelicals' inactivity prior to and in the early years of the democratic era beginning from 1990s. Secondly, and as a result of the previous point, African churches have not been molded into the practice of socio-political analysis as an integral part of their ministry. Either they rely on experts whose works largely compromise

Church witness or they forsake sociopolitical analyses altogether. Thirdly, with African mainstream denominations enjoying favor from their Euro-American mother denominations since colonialism, most Christians have not been really committed to existing indigenous values and practices. For this reason, evangelicals have done or are doing little to nothing in terms of using those indigenous elements in order to work for social well-being in their own countries. This inability of synthesizing tradition and modernity explains why many of them, despite their privileged position in the continent, have not advocated for constitutional and legal revisions in order to modify laws and regulations left by colonialists. They thus assume texts that have been left to the continent since the colonial era. This reality was seen in this study when all but one of those who spoke about the importance of reviewing the criminal justice system did not appeal to any indigenous justice practices. Fourthly, because African churches are dependent on funds from foreign parent churches, their priorities are greatly influenced by directives received from their donors. In such cases, African churches are barely able to initiate programs that are different from their parent churches'. In consequence, the Béninese evangelicals' attitude towards antisocial behaviors rightly images that of Western evangelicalism.

The aforementioned discussion largely explains why the legacy of evangelical Christianity in Bénin, with regard to antisocial behaviors, is not different from modern evangelicals' presence in that area. Giving the urgency of the matter, Mugambi's appeal is worth attention:

> African churches have to face the challenge of equipping themselves for relevant ministry in a rapidly changing continent. They need new forms of ministerial formation, including strategic tertiary training, to produce a cadre of leadership that will help the African Church consolidate its disintegrating centre. A church without such a solid theology has no chance of survival. (*Christian Theology* 103)

The need for such a reorientation of the church in Africa is relevant in the context of what Béninese evangelicals hope to do in the future in their response to antisocial behaviors.

Discovery #3

Béninese evangelicals affirm that Christian justice seeking must go beyond the criminal justice process and serve to reconcile victims and offenders through the use of Scripture-based para-judicial processes.

This study not only sought to describe current evangelical witness amid the growing crisis of antisocial behaviors but also moved to inquire where participants expect to go from the point where they are. The consensus among participants was the need for multiple interventions in order to halt the crisis. Many strongly suggested that the current criminal justice system is completely dangerous, awkward, and unhelpful and for that reason evangelicals must come out and infiltrate the system. For these pastors and church members, church leaders must encourage evangelicals under their care to undertake higher education in order to be able to take the route of law studies and thus be eligible to enter the sectors of the country where laws can be made, remade, applied, or enforced.

Other evangelicals had doubts about that method and calls for churches to undertake parallel actions including youth works, employment initiatives, schools and health clinics, family counseling and education, and reconciliation and mediation services. With an almost upsetting voice, a man from FG #1 said, "Why exactly have we not been thinking along these lines? Whereas Jesus said, 'You are the light of the world,' we have been saying all along that 'we are the light of the church,'" in reference to the fact that the church is too focused on itself. With an equal or even greater emphasis on the spiritual aspect on which they are already focused, these suggestions cohere with

Conn's definition of evangelism as a call to reconciliation with God, as a call to incorporation, as a call to humanization, as a call to celebration, and as a call to justice (27-34). The way then is paved for a new definition of being an evangelical congregation in a Bénin urban setting.

Theological Reflection

The following lines are an attempt to provide a local theological reflection on restorative justice and reconciliation as required by an appropriate approach for developing leaders for urban ministry. While modern philosophy and Christian theologies tend to ignore traditional elements in local cultures, reconstruction theology seeks to rebuild with them insofar as they aid in the process. For this reason, this study goes back to the stories of traditional peacemaking process in order to draw from them values that must be taken in account in the process of an evangelical reconciliation or restorative practice. In order to provide a theological reflection based on the traditional practice of reconciliation and peacemaking, this study gave attention to the stories of as they are told by contemporary Bénineses.

Contemporary Stories of Traditional Peacemaking

Two indigenous types of stories[21] are related to mending strained relationships that are appropriate for the present study. These two local stories can be reappropriated with a Christian vision of the world in an attempt at seeking justice between conflicting parties.

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[21] Given my own weakness in retelling these stories, I have been aided by two elderly persons from my own people group, the Goun people of Southern Bénin, in order to remember them as they are presented here.

The first story concerns disagreements or conflicts that take place between persons of the same family or clans. Such disagreements are dealt with within the family.[22] Usually, uncles, aunts, or other official family or clan heads lead such disagreements. The details of the process of dispute settlements are not usually known in advance. However, everyone usually predicts the outcome, which is the mending of broken relationships and the return to normal family or interpersonal relatedness. What is expected, however, is that everyone involved will be accorded adequate time for self-expression or for telling the story of the issue at stake. Victims, offenders, and their families are usually heard by the elders who then analyze the issue and utter the pronouncement. Once the offender is known as such, he or she must be brought to acknowledge the wrongdoing. If the wrongdoing happened as a result of inattention from his or her family parents (e.g., lack of education or care), then they will be summoned to take their responsibilities toward their child. Following, he or she will be led to return back what was stolen (restitution). In case the stolen property was already used and he or she is not able to return it, the offender and family members are enjoined to restitute together. Restitution would entail taking care of the victim in case he or she needs any physical care. Then the elder would follow up with several admonitions to the offenders and his or her immediate family (i.e., words that would affect them in a way that the situation would not be repeated in the future).

In case when the dispute was not settled at this point due to the offender's refusal to acknowledge his or her wrongdoing, the next stage is *Ye na da zekpon bo tun*, the

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[22] This story takes for granted the notion of extended family, thus including more than what is usually called nuclear family.

water service at or from a lake called Zekpon. The service can be used in two ways. Either the conflicting parties go to the lake together to use the water there or the elders leading the process go to the lake to bring the water back home for use. The lake is a sacred place constantly guarded by some spiritual leaders who are paid before the place can be used or the water taken. A divinity in that place is believed to facilitate reconciliation when trusted. The main thing done at that place is to allow the conflicting parties to be exposed with the sacredness and the power of the divinity who then brings forth sincerity from the bottom of the concerned parties' hearts. Based on the divinity's influence in their lives, the offender who might be denying his or her wrongdoing prior usually self-identifies at that place or the victim who might be refusing forgiveness prior embraces the path of peace at that place. The ensuing consequence is that mediators continue on into reconciling both parties. That reconciliation is symbolized by a shared swallowing of the sacred water from lake Zekpon and the spitting of that water on the earth. This ritual is a symbol of the return of peace on earth through the former enemies. Each party will take the water in and immediately spit it saying, *I detach myself from this issue and will not hold anything against you from now on.*

At times mediators prefer not to bring conflicting parties to the lake *Zekpon*. One such circumstance would be if the conflict has attained a high level to the point of having effects on other aspects of family life such as health and finances. In those cases, mediators prefer to keep conflicting parties at home while they make the trip to the lake to get the water. In this way, the water can be spitted as a sign of reconciliation and can also touch affected areas of the family that could not be taken to the lake, such as sick

children,[23] unproductive farms, and business affairs. What is sought here is the healing from any negative consequence brought about by the rift and the return to normalcy. Usually things settle between foes at this level of peacemaking but there are a few cases in which offenders or victims may refuse to go through the ritual of healing using water. In such cases, the family or clan mediators would bring the issue to the village chief level with words of accusation directed against the person, whether victim or offender, who might have refused the amicable settlement. The accusation usually says that the person who refuses to swallow and spit the water is a potential murderer because he or she does not want to forgive his or her neighbor. The elders, under the leadership of the village chief, will then take on the charge to settle the issue at the public setting (*Avato*).

Here also, the emphasis is less upon the process and more upon the goal, which remains the same as with the above. The mediators at this level are the leaders of the larger village or town, and not the elders of the families of the conflicting parties. These latter are involved in the process but not as mediators or those who utter the last words in the process. When the offender is identified easily, restitution is also in order. In addition to restitution, the persons leading the reconciliation expresses the shame brought about by the wrongdoing and *sell the offender* who in turn will pay the price of the selling (*Ye na sa e bo e na su*).[24] This practice expresses the foreign-ness of offending in the society and

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[23] A lady who shared this story with me remembered seeing her son having a bowel movement for the first time in several days during an intense conflict with another person in the clan. The turn around was experienced after she shared in the water of peacemaking brought back from the lake *Zekpon* during the process of reconciliation.

[24] I doubt the concept can be well rendered in English, but the idea is not that of selling the offender to someone else but an act of purification of the society, which happens through the offender who channeled the foreign act into the society. Perhaps, that which is sold is the false identity of wrongdoing in the offender that must be summoned to go and leave the real person.

because it is intrusive of the normal social peace, offenders must be "sold." The offender usually "pays himself off" in order to allow the purification of the society seeing that offending came about through him or her. The payment is made when the offender, along with his or her family, spends money or resources to provide food or beverage or a goat depending on the village chief's decision. Whatever he is required to pay will be cooked and eaten by all participants in the reconciliation process. If the offender does not yield to mediators' settlement the next stage is to allow him or her to prove innocence in the presence of a given divinity chosen for the circumstance for innocence verification. When innocence verification takes place, practitioners and priests go with the divinity to the public place where the dispute resolution was taking place. Once there, the offender will have to swear on the divinity and, in some cases, the victim also swears that the accusation being made is true. At this point, the truth is usually identified through what happens following the swearing. The liar usually dies, but if he or she does not die and just has a mysterious negative happening, the leaders of the village or town proceed with ending his or her life.

These stories of indigenous practices of reconciliation can be appropriated from an evangelical perspective, something that Béninese evangelicals are reluctant to doing. The following lines provide some attempts at theological appropriation of Béninese indigenous method of reconciliation.

Indigenous Ideas for Mediation or Peacemaking, Not Theories and Experts

The first thing that stands out from Béninese traditional peacemaking is the importance of local mediators leading the process. Whether at the family level or the village level, mediators are trusted leaders that conflicting parties are already used to and

can relate to with their problems. They have a long-standing credibility as persons concerned with the well-being of everyone under their care and as persons committed to the same religious values they all believe. Present then in the minds and hearts of concerned parties is the trust that these local leaders are embedded with integrity and are committed to no deception. This approach is in stark contrast to modern arrangements where, whether in the criminal justice system, professional counseling, or peacemaking, the emphasis is on outside theories and experts. The concern for neutrality or objectivity on which reliance on expert is based cannot hold given problems of corruption and inefficiency encountered with works done by experts. Attention to local ideas and the equipping of local helpers can well serve better the purpose particularly when done from the perspective of Christian ethics and responsibility.

John Paul Lederach acknowledges the importance of the indigenous knowledge in the approach to conflict mediation across cultures he expounds. He calls for an understanding of cultural patterns and for trying to develop alternate models implicit or explicit within the norms and values of the natives' cultures. Lederach cautions against a prescriptive or technological perspective to mediation that operates on a transfer modality. Such an approach "presents a conflict resolution model that assumes universality of both the basic social function and the more particular social form created to fulfill this need" (53). Against such a prescriptive approach, he appeals for the use of an approach he calls "elicitive" to equip local mediators. The elicitive approach places natives at the center of the problem and with them discovers, names, categorizes, evaluates and moves to practical application (59-61). Consequently, to implement reconstructive approach to tackling antisocial behaviors in Bénin context will demand

first an endeavor to give voice to concerned Béninese people themselves in order that they reflect on issues from the perspective of their own perspective.

However, evangelical practitioners must legitimately resist being purely elicitive. The reason for not being purely elicitive is that both prescriptive and elicitive approaches have their weaknesses. On cultural as well as on theological grounds such approaches bear significant weaknesses. For instance, remaining purely elicitive could lead practitioners to miss important cross-cultural points of contact and fertilization and reduce peacemaking to a narrow game of cultural exploration. This method then could lead to a kind of cultural romanticism that does not allow other cultures to enrich one's own. Elmer Duane addresses this issues and helpfully states, "God who authored diversity loves it, embraces those who display it, and honors those who celebrate it" (182). Therefore, while expanding horizons on the elicitive side, evangelicals should be attuned to where there is a hindrance in the elicitive process and seek ways by which riches from other cultures may be helpful in the reconstruction process. On the other hand, evangelical ministry will not be Christocentric if limited to cultural negotiation. This aspect calls for the importance of being grounded in healthy biblical and theological views in areas such as human beings, community, sin, suffering, and health. Taking all these aspects (cultural and theological) in account leads to becoming and helping others become contextual practical theologians.

Emphasis on Return of Peace and Reconciliation, Not Retaliation

As discussed in this study, the preoccupation of the criminal justice system is to inflict punishment to the wrongdoer. In traditional Béninese vision, the preoccupation is on the return of peace between conflicting parties and the return of peace in the

environment where they live. For that reason, the punishment of the offender is never for the purpose of inflicting pains but for making things right between the foes and in the village. The Old Testament's notion justice making is similar according to Zehr's discussion of the administration of justice in that time:

> When wrongs were done, ordinary people went to the city gates to seek justice in a "legal assembly" in which citizens participated. The focus of the court, sometimes called an organization of reconciliation, was not to satisfy an abstract concept of justice but to find a solution.... Restitution and compensation were common outcomes.... Offenses were understood to be wrongs against people and against shalom, and the justice process involved a process of settlement.... [P]unishment was often understood to occur in a context of love and community...was accompanied by renewal of the covenant...could be viewed as fair and deserved...kept open the possibility of eventual reconciliation and restoration rather than perpetual alienation. (*Changes Lenses* 140-42)

Given the previous description of dispute settlement in traditional Bénin, evangelicals can see this practice as a prevenient grace of God because, as discussed in this study, the seeking of peace is also God's concern in cases of wrongdoing. No matter what the content of the process of mediation is the end result sought is peace in troubled relationships. As one informant lady reported to me, once conflicting parties get to the point where elders plead for the end of the conflict they are all ready to give up and embrace one another. But if the embrace does not happen at that point, it is likely to happen at the level of the ritual of water, which symbolizes freshness in relationships.

Talk of reconciliation has come to convey some misconceptions about forgiveness that stand at odd with the goal of reconstructive justice. Although the champions the theological possibility for two opposing parties embrace after deep experience of exclusion, Miroslav Volf helpfully clarifies that "[f]orgiveness is not a substitute for justice. Forgiveness is not mere discharge of a victim's angry resentment" (*Exclusion and*

Embrace 121). Indeed, forgiving someone for doing something wrong does not mean that the victim has accepted the wrongdoing, or that he or she allows diminution of dignity or self-worth. Forgiveness does not mean that the victim cannot explain to others and to the offender how evil is the latter's hurt or offense. Forgiveness does not mean that the victim cannot request reparation or that the mediator will not lead the process into requesting restitution from the wrongdoers. Forgiveness within the framework of reconciliation or reconstructive justice as argued in this study demands just the opposite of all the above.

Volf sheds light on the idea of reconciliation by clarifying that it can only work out if the victim, having embraced the triune God, "is ready to receive the other into itself and undertake a re-adjustment of its identity in light of the other's alterity" (*Exclusion and Embrace* 110). Volf thus places his vision of reconciliation within the story of God and humanity. God took the initiative to forgive humanity for the sake of reconciling them to himself. He is thus the model for the way human beings re supposed forgive and reconcile because he did what he did by taking up our humanity. Also, Volf, underscoring the communal *telos* of human beings created by God, suggests that reconciliation is the potential that flows from a situation in which wrongdoer and forgiver have come to terms with the offense. If God forgives so that he may be in relationship with his people, his purpose is to raise up persons who do the same.

Forgiveness is powerful to draw two people who have been divided by wrongdoing and offense back into communion. To this end, forgiveness and reconciliation constitute important characteristics of God's people. While forgiveness enables enemies to be friends once again, it does not give the oppressor a license to

continue in oppression. Just as giving strengthens the bonds of community, so to can forgiving mend and restore relationship (*Free of Charge* 189). Reconciliation is not possible without repentance from the wrongdoer and forgiveness from the victim. Other-oriented acts are necessary from both parties in order for reconciliation to happen. Evangelicals who are committed to responding to antisocial behaviors can "insist on the unbreakable unity of forgiveness and embrace" (190) in order to allow reconstructive justice.

A Social or Relational View of Wrongdoing, Not an Individualistic View

The criminal justice system and major theories of therapeutic treatment convey an individualistic focus on sin or wrongdoing by focusing on the offender. In traditional justice and peacemaking crime happens to disturb peace and is resolved only by focusing on the relational dynamic between offenders and victims and also on their family networks as well. Zehr suggests the same thing in his discussion on the historical notion of justice even in Western countries: "Until well into the modern era, crime was viewed primarily in an interpersonal context. Most crime essentially represented a wrong toward or a conflict between people" (*Changing Lenses* 99). For this reason, like in traditional Bénin, the families of the victims and offenders were always present and part of the solution to the problem. Zehr does well by calling this approach community justice, which he defines as follow:

> Both the harm done and the resulting "justice" process were clearly placed in a community context. Wrongs were often viewed collectively. When an individual was wronged, the family and community felt it as wrong also. And family and community were involved in the resolution in substantial way.... Community justice placed a high premium on negotiation, extrajudicial settlements, usually involving compensation. (100-01)

Such a vision of wrongdoing and justice, though formerly practiced and formative of Bénin people, has come to be replaced by a sharply different one that focuses on the individual. The basis of this collectivistic notion is also grounded in a relational view of human beings. A. B. Nsamenang, a West African developmental psychologist, warns that many psychological theories built in Western industrial society are not only ethnocentric but tend to be taught and used in the third world as Gospel truth. His provocative appeal is to expand the method and vision of psychology beyond the individual as an exclusive focus of analysis. The reason for suggesting this is that, "the human person is not a decontextualized organism floating in a universal sea of civilization" (165). Rather, "human beings live in diverse environments that are culturally perceived and reacted to" (165). In West Africa then, the concept of personhood is a dynamic concept; the individual exist in and for the community. Such a collectivistic orientation to life makes one realize that "individual interests must be subordinated for the public interest" (76). In this case, community justice finds a well prepared terrain to grow on as victims and offenders seek together the well-being of the community. Later victory over wrongdoing means that the whole community, including the wrongdoer, has take action for the antisocial behavior to not be repeated again.

Rituals Involving the Divine, Not Secularism

Most of the approaches used to deal with antisocial behaviors are either devoid of rituals or they used relationally poor ones. Lisa Schirch underscores the importance of rituals:

> Ritual acts like a prism that allows people to view the world through a new lens that emphasizes relationships and a wider, more complete understanding of the nature of conflict. Ritual prisms can make problems seem irrelevant and bring a sense of order back to people in conflict by

> providing new symbols, myths, metaphors, stories, actions, or objects that help individuals and groups make sense out of their experience. (117)

Such use of ritual aims at restoring people who, though called to live in relationships, have been broken by a crisis.

Not only do individuals exist in relationship with others human beings, but they also exist in connection with the spiritual world. As Emele M. Uka suggests, Africans believe that smoke does not appear without fire, and for this reason diseases or pains are customarily interpreted as caused by the activities of malevolent gods or spirit forces which invade man's life (160). Addressing a crisis, therefore, demands that people question and deal with not only the state of relationships with one another but also the spiritual world. In the cases of conflicts, human intervention through mediators is usually enmeshed with the use of traditional beliefs as means of interpreting and explaining problems and disagreements (161).

During peacemaking and in regular life, traditional Béninese have a sense of the divine in the matters of antisocial behaviors. Barthélemy Zinzindohoué mentions the special god often referred to in these cases:

> *Xêvioso* (or *Xêbioso*) ... is the *Vodun* [or divinity] of the sky (*Jivodun*) who manifests himself in thunder and lightning. He is Mawu's [or God's] second son and is considered a *Vodun* of justice who punishes thieves, liars, criminals and evil-doers.

The widely sensitivity to *Xêvioso* and the consequent regular rituals in traditional Bénin are perhaps one reason why antisocial behaviors were rare. The same reason can explain why when antisocial behaviors do happen, offenders quickly submit to mediation in order to return to the order of society.

The importance of drawing from the traditional method of conflict transformation lies in the value of rituals used in those circumstances. Schirch is to the point when she discusses the importance of rituals for conflict transformation (22-23). Socializing rituals teach, remind, and reconfirm the rules, values, and structures that bind persons together while transforming rituals challenges and change the status quo:

> Both socializing and transforming rituals are needed for peacebuilding. All cultures have existing, traditional rituals for building relationships, limiting violence, and solving problems.... [S]ometimes peacebuilders can help revive or draw on existing rituals within a culture that can help set the stage for transformational peacebuilding activities and processes. (23)

Schirch is right because making tabula rasa on all pre-existing practices in a culture as is characteristic of evangelicals is wrong. Kevin Avruch argues that the clinical perspective of conflict resolution, which derives theory from practices, can be misleading when such theories are transposed to other places (4). He therefore argues for a reverse orientation in cross-cultural practice. He talks about starting with the people (ethno), rather than techniques (practice). For him, "where theories (about self and others, about affect, about conflict, about right and wrong, etc.,...) are situated, there will practices be derived"(12) This perspective would lead pastoral counselors, mediators, or peacemakers in Bénin to work with people based on Béninese indigenous views on self and others, human right, wrongdoing, etc. and respond creatively from those perspectives.

For ministry to be evangelical in that context, however, contextual theologizing is necessary. For in each situation, the need to be attuned to how the message of Christ can bring new life and how the significance of the cross can become real and life offering to people being served will be paramount. Understanding how to use different metaphors that can help communicate the message of the cross and the work of the Spirit become

crucial. Therefore ministers will go beyond depending only on predetermined metaphors about the cross and "continually seek out metaphors, new and old, that speak effectively and specifically to our" (Green and Baker 115) own context.

Lederach suggests a constructive view of handling conflict, which strengthens the narrative approach adopted by this study. According to this view people act on the basis of the meaning things have for them. Fundamentally, Lederach argues that "understanding conflict and developing appropriate models of handling it will necessarily be rooted in, and must respect and draw from, the cultural knowledge of a people"(Lederach 31). His is a strong belief that in peace building people in the settings are key resources, not recipients; indigenous knowledge is a pipeline to discover meaning and appropriate action; participation of local people in the process is central; building from available resources fosters self-sufficiency and sustainability; and empowerment involves a process that fosters awareness-of-self in context and validates discovery, naming, and creation through reflection (10). As evangelicals undertake reconstructive justice in Bénin by engaging people and cultures in a similar way, they must not however disconnect this from the Church's long cherished Scriptural goal, which is to "shape people and social systems" (Green and Baker 151) with the message of the cross and resurrection. Here again the "importance of using metaphors and language that draw on the shared experience and vocabulary of people" (151) in their "time and place" (151) is important

The lake Zekpon being a religious place communicates the sense that the water brought from there, which serves to symbolize freshness during the ritual of peacemaking, is spiritual water. This approach remains at odd with the non-religious or

non-spiritual approach to dealing with antisocial behaviors. In an evangelical manner, however, one cannot encourage the *contents* and the *referents* of the spirituality found in the tradition of Bénin people but the *form* found there is necessary. Contents such as *Xêbioso* or the divinity at the lake Zekpon must be transformed or rejected in light of the Gospel of Christ. Additionally, the form of that Gospel brought by modern evangelicalism must also be transformed in light of the traditional content of peacemaking. For instance the Gospel must recover the Trinitarian understanding of God and takes the shape of a social presence instead of an individualistic one. Also, at times, peacemaking might also take the form of going to a Zekpon-like place with conflicting parties where emphasis will be on the action of the Spirit of God in people's lives even as the ritual symbolism of water—which also resonates with Scripture—is maintained as a refreshing symbol in human relationships from God.

Consequent Evangelical Social Engagement

The literature review and the interviews of this study along with the previous reflection on reconciliation together bring out important theological foundations for a vibrant witness of evangelical congregation in urban setting.

Firstly, the credibility of the church in society lies, not in endlessly caring for those who are already inside its walls, but in aiming at being a public voice for the well-being of all. Herein is not a dichotomy of inside versus outside witness, but a radical repositioning of the church as God's agent *in* society rather than at the heaven's airport waiting to fly home. When the church thus redefines itself it rearranges the caring of its members in order to suit the goal of transformation of the society. Exploration of the ministry metaphors of Amos, Hosea, Jesus, and the early Christian movement are biblical

bases to support this vision. They served humanity by seeking its reconstruction and freedom from the deadly socio-spiritual forces of their times, providing thus a model for those (i.e., Christians) who find themselves in the same divine narrative they lived in.

Secondly, if the evangelical church is to be this sort of witness, fundamental identity markers that define evangelicalism must be reviewed. Among them are concepts such as grace, salvation, spirituality, and sin. Evangelical tradition is known to define these important themes in an individualistic fashion, Snyder argues. While this study did not discuss these themes with participants in this research, it is nevertheless safe to say that Béninese evangelicals handle these themes in the same way. To be evangelical in Bénin is to be from a congregation that preaches and stresses these themes. Nevertheless, this study reveals the stress of these themes did not cause most evangelicals to be concerned about the social degradation that continues to increase in their neighborhoods. For this reason, the need for emphasizing that Jesus died a public death is crucial. Such an emphasis will help understand, as this study discussed from the Gospel of Luke, that Jesus' commitment to address issues that are in public settings led him to a public death so that contemporary issues must be dealt with by people who align themselves with him in his life, death, and resurrection. The imperative of this redefinition of fundamental evangelical themes is also verified by the fact that not only church members but also evangelical ministers are now said to be involved in antisocial behaviors. Certainly, a redefinition of the public nature of Christian salvation can be able to persuade evangelicals that faith is credible when it gives good witness in the public milieu. Achieving the goal of making faith public is necessary for certain aspects of justice

reconstruction argued for in this study such as preventive holistic ministries, engaging gangs groups, mediation, and reconstruction services.

Third, consistent with African theology of reconstruction on which this study is based, addressing the issue of antisocial behaviors in a comprehensive manner must lead the church to tap into the cultural ingredients that exist within Bénin's religio-cultural world. In Bénin, sort of cultural amnesia is characteristic of the overall evangelical tendency of bashing off the totality of Bénin's cultural heritage, as Claffey discovered in his ethnographical notes:

> Taken together, [these sorts of anti-culture declarations are] ... very significant, with several common themes which, in my view, reveal a society in considerable difficulty. In the most negative sense, they represent a rejection of family and culture that can only result in extreme alienation and certainly poses problems for the construction of a modern state and society. They can be replicated in other interviews many times over across the whole spectrum of Bénin Christianity and the sermons and seminars addressing these issues are the most common. (245)

This description can be said to be verified by the fact that of all the participants interviewed for this research, only the 62 year old man has been able to evoke Bénin's traditional heritage of reconciling offenders and victims. In all other instances when I asked other participants in other groups, no one was able to tell those old stories. The narrative methodology opted for in this study (i.e., narrative individual and family therapy and narrative restorative justice) cannot afford burying those stories. They must be brought forth and critically assessed in a way that existing good resources in Béninese religio-cultural heritage will be used for the purpose of personal and collective reconstruction.

Fourth, given the theological suggestion of making public evangelical faith, evangelicals must be brought to rethink their theology of ministerial training. The

exclusive Western method of training professional theologians and pastors who would, in turn, serve the flock under their care has proven to be inefficient to engage society. The stream of Béninese evangelicals who, in reaction to the Western model of training, have completely rejected training for ministry are also unable to engage the urban setting in which they find themselves. Trained professional theologians and pastors must now rediscover their common calling as God's agents of change and thus reinvent ministerial training in a way that equips people for various works in the city. Within this vision, Figure 2.1 (p. 143) provides for a comprehensive strategy of justice reconstruction that demands that people intervening in each area be trained for appropriate Christ-honoring works.

Elliston and Kauffman are very helpful in this regard as they focused specifically on developing leaders for ministry in the urban setting. Extremely illuminating are the specific cases of training programs, not for the purpose of reader's copying them, but to learn how real people responded to their urban realities with alternative training programs (25-55). Disagreeing with their assessment about theological education is difficult. Their suggestions for developing an alternative approach to raise leader for urban ministry are helpful. Basically, such an approach must be characterized by some key elements:

√ Contextualization by addressing local context where learners are to serve;

√ Churchward orientation by raising church leaders in a way that will multiply other growing churches;

√ Strategic flexibility by being willing to adjust training according to changing needs;

√ Theological grounding by not teaching all theological sides but one theological basis from which ministry flows;

√ Integrated program by blending spiritual formation, ministry experience, dynamic reflection, and inputs;

√ Community life by encouraging learners to build deep relationship with community they serve; and,

√ Christian mind by aiming at converting learners' worldview, converting to Christian faith and growing into strong commitment to Christ (149-55).

Such an approach will be able to extend church-based or community-based training of God's people in order to allow the redemptive presence of all God's people in the city.

Limitations of the Study

This study was an attempt to describe current responses of evangelical congregations toward antisocial behaviors in the context of Bénin failing criminal justice system. This study was carried out through the method of telephone focus group discussion. Limiting factors in this study relate to gender, denominational representation, and instrumentation.

Gender and Experience Criteria

While the interview pool of this study consisted of both genders, men were the dominant figures. Obvious distinctive insights came from the few women who participated. Had more women been involved, the findings may have been different in terms of reinforcement of what is found here or its modification. Also, this study encouraged those who have had experiences with antisocial behaviors to volunteer to participate, allowing participants with experiences as victims to predominate this study.

The views shared here by participants could then be emotionally driven or reactive and may be seen as overtly subjective.

Denominational Representation

This study, because it purports to talk about evangelicals in general, sought small groups from different evangelical horizons, obviously certain evangelical denominations or streams that are not represented here. For instance, the Foursquare Church, the Union of Evangelical Churches of Bénin (SIM related), and countless indigenous evangelical ministries such as the MHIF (highly spoken about in terms of their ministry toward antisocial persons) are not represented either. If they had participated, their insights would have enriched or modified the conclusion of this study.

Instrumentation

The approach used for gathering data was somewhat unusual. Because this study used a telephone group discussion method, telephone disturbances for certain group interviews occurred. Whereas redials were completed quickly, and I was able to continue the discussions that were disturbed, some of the flow of thoughts might have been interrupted. As a result, some loss of thoughts occurred that could have made some difference in the study. Also, if a few more groups had been interviewed, the data gathered could have been more and varied in order to allow a better interpretation. The method of selection of pastors and their groups probably played a role in the type of response given. I knew only one pastor among those interviewed and another church member in another group. The extent to which the lack of familiarity between myself and the interviewees motivated some responses is not clear. Lastly, the formulation of the interview questions could have been a factor in how interviewees responded. In spite of

the fact that I gave much attention to the process of building interview questions, strategies such as phrasing and words used could have given different results.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Following the research findings and the overall purpose of this study, I suggest these areas as beneficial for further studies.

First, given the insistence of making public Christian faith, in what ways can evangelicals in Bénin or in Africa in general, redefine a proper church-state relationship and not live with the one inherited from modern missionaries? What does that relationship look like in practice? Such a study will discuss whether appropriate church-state relationship can be built after the model of indigenous sociopolitical relationship with traditional African religion. The study will allow discovering whether the inherited Western approach determines current Béninese evangelical inactivity regarding the public crisis of antisocial behaviors. The purpose of such a study would not be to encourage Béninese evangelicals' participation in politics because that already exists. The concern will be in what ways evangelicals are to participate in public life in order to be of real help for the common good. One of the participants in this study registered the following complaint:

> There have been some evangelicals in the government since the time of former president Kérékou, but they did not make a big difference for the population. They simply worked for themselves to fatten themselves, to take free and easy visas in order to travel, to go everywhere around the world, without doing anything substantial to facilitate the cause of the gospel in the country.

Given complaints such as this one a study that will not only encourage evangelicals' involvement but to provide a clear definition and image of what that involvement looks like is sorely needed.

Second, in what way can African theological education maintain a healthy relationship with social sciences studies in order to address social ills? During this research, one seminary trained pastor asked me whether I am really studying at a seminary or whether I was studying criminology in a university and was just using a strategy to get information from pastors. He asked this question because it was strange for him that a seminarian is interested in criminality. If salvation aims at social transformation as defined in this study, can the modern method of training ministers who finish their studies with academic information without being able to wrestle with social issues sustain a vital ministry?

Third, in what ways can an evangelical theology of salvation and related themes grounded in the religio-cultural environment of Bénin be helpful for the (re)making of pro-social evangelical congregations? The preoccupation of such a study will be to discuss whether because salvation has been cast down in categories alien to realities lived by Béninese the resulting communities are struggling with being witnesses of Christ in their milieu.

All of these areas of studies will be beneficial in enhancing the quality and understanding of evangelical witnesses in an African context of antisocial behaviors.

Contribution to Research

During this research I have discovered lots of materials in different areas concerned with the topic studied. They range from criminal justice to psychological counseling including biblical and theological materials sympathetic to social issues. These materials, however, are disconnected from one another particularly as it relates to the issue of antisocial behaviors. Criminal justice materials have been adapted or

critiqued through extensive works done already by theorists and practitioners of restorative justice. However, the comprehensive approach adopted in this study makes restorative justice practice in need of additional components. Hence, materials in social justice and (narrative) counseling were blended together in addition to those of restorative justice for a holistic vision of therapeutic discipleship. Such a vision expressed in Figure 2.1 (p. 143) will allow for a better reconstruction of justice in the land.

This study can also serve as an encouragement for distance telephone focus group study. Whereas I was not sure of its success in the beginning, I was amazed at how every debriefing time with my research assistant was very affirming of the method. One of the ways in which I decided to keep myself in check about the progress of the long distance discussion was to debrief interviews with my research assistant in order to take in account his remarks for the following discussions. He has always told me that the minor problem some groups experienced was when the telephone line cut. Other than that, the discussion went very fine. With my voice coming to them clearly through the phone, he said that they experience the conversation as if I was there beside them and in discussion with them. Despite the imperfections related to this method, it nevertheless confirmed the practicability of the use of telephone focus group discussion in certain circumstances.

Practical Application

A number of applications emerged from the literature, interviews, and synthesis of both that can help mobilize evangelicals to respond better to the plight related to antisocial behaviors. These applications are based both on the model laid at the end of Chapter 2 and on the summary of ideas suggested by participants for a better evangelical social involvement. One amazing discovery realization during this study is that virtually

all the ideas suggested by participants are already included in the model depicted at the end of Chapter 2 (p. 143). This model places the consequent practical applications of this study not as ideas that will be foreign to evangelicals but as strategies that are already sprouting from them.

First, the task of mobilizing evangelicals through holding awareness meetings or seminars in both cities is crucial. Already through the interviews that I carried out with the groups involved in this study, I have received very positive feedbacks particularly at the level of question # 5 of the interviews. My research assistant also told me several times that many participants came to the telephone discussion prepared with written answers on their questionnaire sheets as if they were given school homework, which testifies to their high interest in the topic because of its relevance to the current social situation. I was also surprised that a woman told me at the end of one of the discussions, "[T]hank you for educating us and opening our eyes," although I did not do any teaching. This proves that just the fact of discussing and letting people process what is happening and inviting them to think critically toward an indigenous response can catalyze evangelical awakening to a greater social involvement.

Another aspect of the mobilizing consists of encouraging cooperation across the spectrums of evangelicalism. Frictions and internal divisions among evangelicals exist in such that many are having difficulty cooperating with one another across denominational lines. As a participant in FG # 8 said, "Christians are able to bring something new to the situation, but indiscipline and lack of cooperative spirit among evangelicals render that participation almost impossible." Clearly a robust socio-theological foundation for the

church in Africa grounded in contemporary reconstructionist vision is needed for evangelicals to get rid of internal friction and to embody their common Lord together.

Second, once some evangelicals do come together, they need to be exposed to practical ministry training in specific areas of concerned as laid out in this study. Such areas as narrative therapy, narrative mediation, victim offender reconciliation training, church-based prison ministry (engaging prisoners and incarceration personnel), and practical ideas for social or holistic ministries must be tackled in a well thought-out training plan. Carrying out those training with people who have specific projects or visions for implementing them is the best course of action. These specific projects will lead to several community-based initiatives for a true restoration of justice in the land.

Third, needed is a series of consultations among current evangelicals working in the area of law or justice in the cities and discuss with them in a way that leads to a shared sense of calling for justice making. Such consultations may end with careful and well-ordered strategies for impacting the degraded criminal justice system of Bénin.

Fourth, emerging evangelical intellectuals need to study in the areas of criminology and its now emerging aspect of restorative justice. In Bénin, not even criminology is taught as an academic discipline. Only those who study law and political sciences are dealing with crime in the Bénin justice system. Criminology, though a relatively new discipline, is well established in English-speaking African countries and around the world. Béninese scholars breaking into this field must give attention to handling antisocial behaviors in light of traditional and cultural ways of dealing with crimes. If this approach is taken seriously, evangelicals will then be able to provide

society with experts in the area committed to a restorative approach to dealing with crime because, normally, no African criminology is non-restorative.

Fifth, given the plethora of incarceration centers where prisoners' are mistreated, it would be a worthy enterprise to plan carefully for the implementing para-judicial strategies in of the centers. Once basic training of community mediators or restorative justice practitioners is done or even underway, the leader or trainer will engage one of the centers as a site for practicum. Positive experiences in that setting will serve as a basis for persuading other incarceration centers across the cities. This method may serve as a strategy to change the justice system outlook in the future, not based on a coercive Christian establishment but based on providing evidence for the needed changes and additional elements for true justice to take place in the land.

Concluding Statements

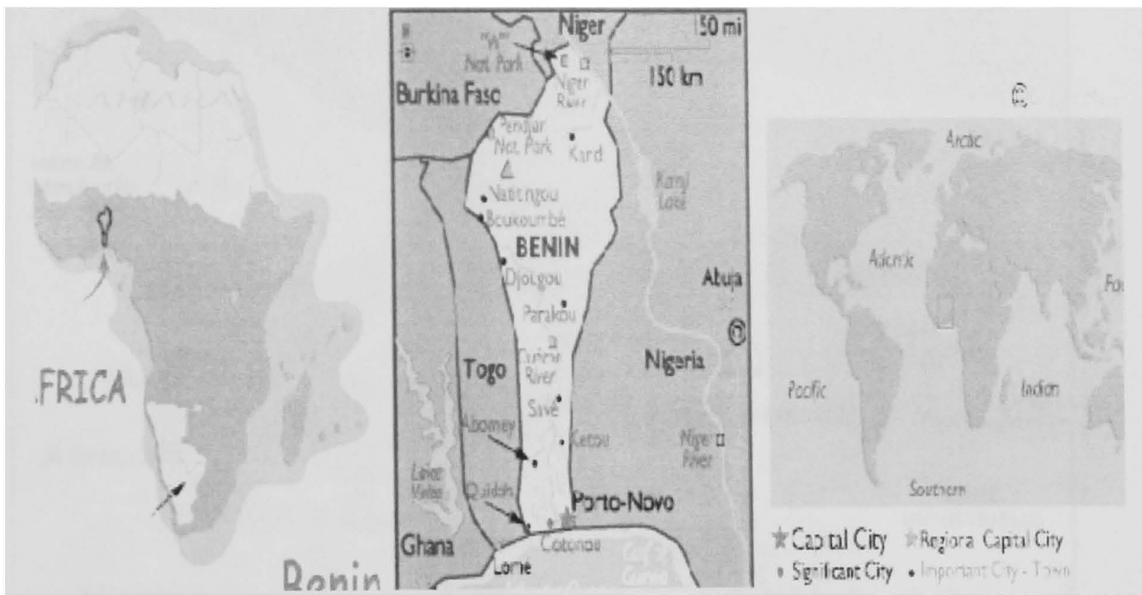
In my faith journey I have known, in addition to reading critics of evangelicalism, personal friends who have always wanted to know why I am so devoted to being a Christian, let alone an evangelical. They were (and continue to be) sincerely concerned that I will lose my potentiality to be of help in society because they only know that evangelicals are focused on life after death to the extent that this life does not matter. Whereas I can still argue my friends' criticism as a mere antagonism to Christian faith, I think some people can legitimately dismiss Christian faith due to the presence of evangelicals around them. Thus are the poor, the oppressed, and those who have no voice amid the growing crisis of antisocial behaviors. The majority of these people may be non-Christians, but some Christians may also come to this point if nothing is done to correct evangelicals' witness in the context of antisocial behaviors.

This study served to describe current evangelical responses to antisocial behaviors in Bénin. In an effort to explore the rational for a viable evangelical witness I not only explored existing literature in the area but also discussed with a select number of evangelicals in small groups. While the current witness does not look satisfactory, one can hope for a better evangelical presence in the urban setting of Cotonou and Porto-Novo based on the data I collected. This study provides a comprehensive, multilayered approach to reconstructing justice. It addresses personal as well as social transformation, Christian community as well as neighborhood transformation, ministry as well as other professional works. The model that I suggest in this study leads to good use of cultural and social sciences materials based on a therapeutic biblical and theological foundation. The suggestions that I gathered from the evangelicals that I interviewed cohere with the proposed model. With this framework, the whole Church of God, not a selected few, will be at work for the common good. A strange surprise will result if the implementation of this method does not bring about Christ-centered justice reconstruction in the land.

APPENDIX A

The Location of Bénin

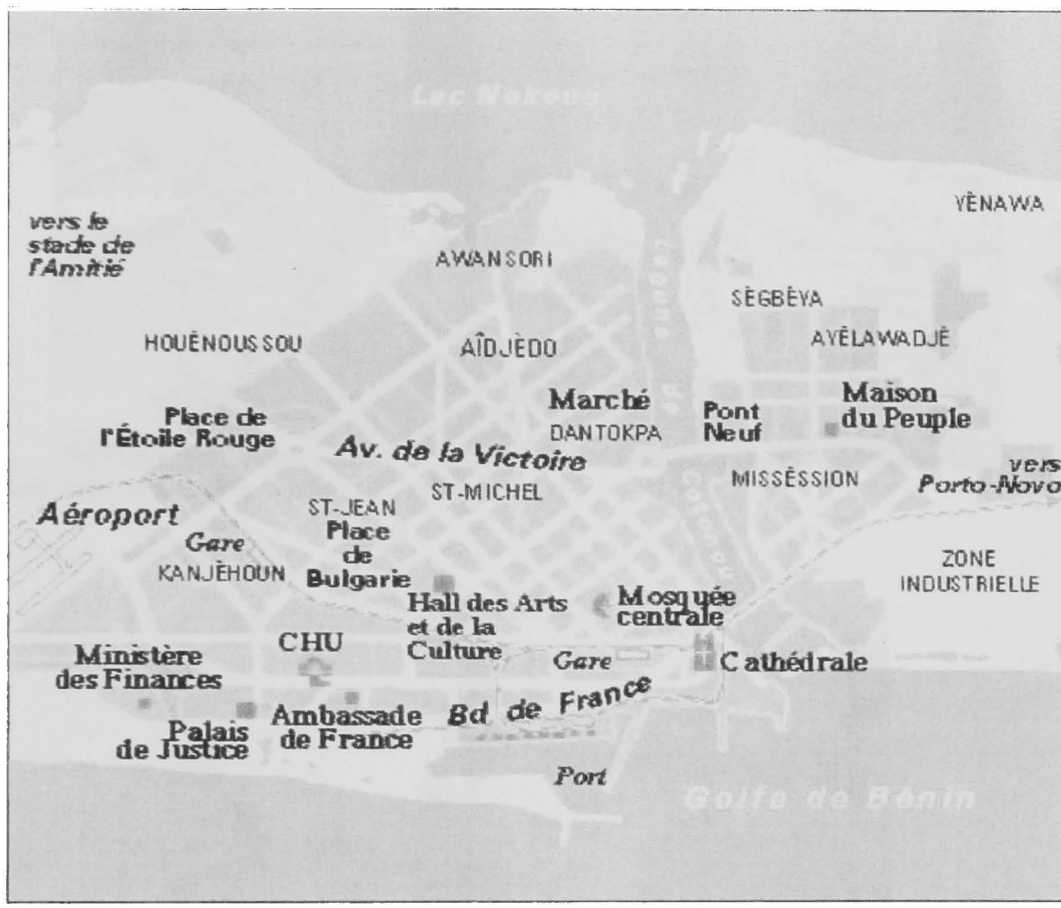
Bénin in Africa **Map of the Republic of Bénin** **Bénin in the World**



Source: "Benin Map."

APPENDIX B

Map of Cotonou



Source: "Cotonou Map."

APPENDIX C

Sample Views of Slums in Cotonou

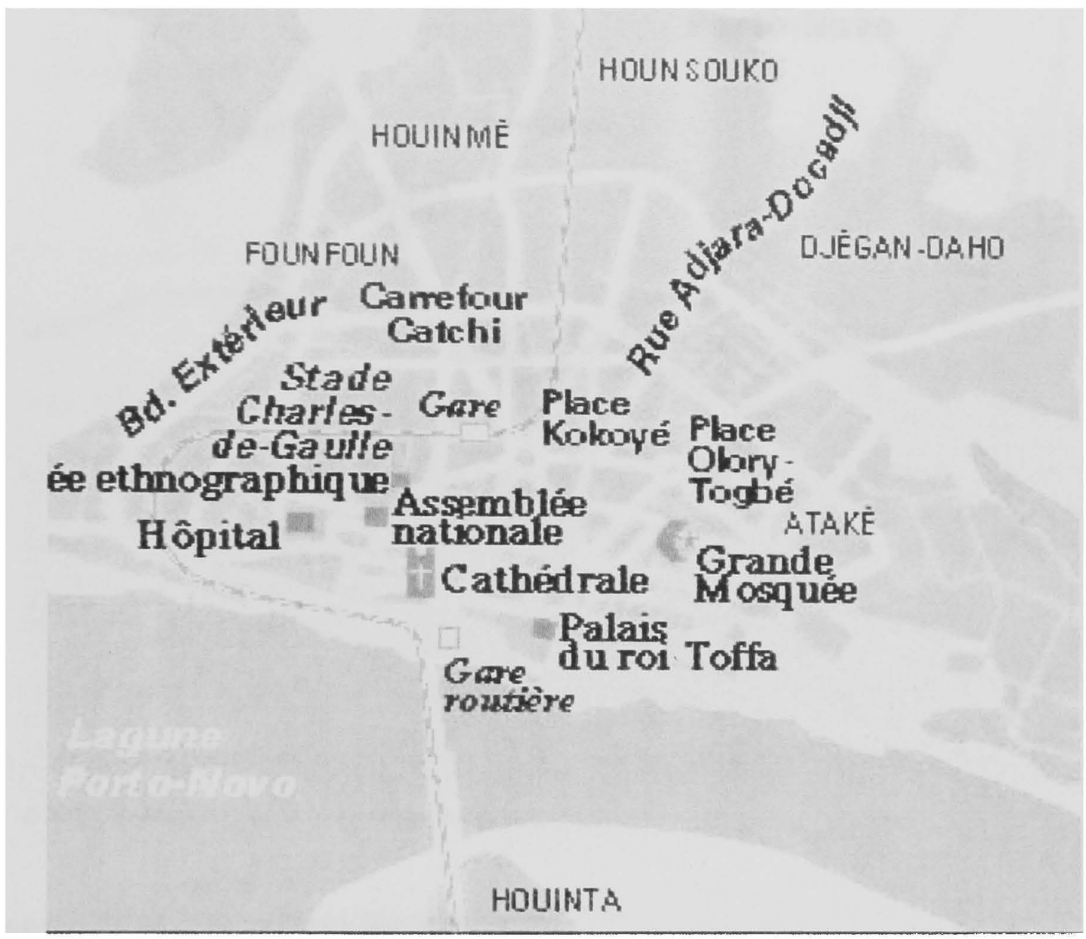
A slum area in Placodji, south of Cotonou

A slum area in Akpakpadodomey, Cotonou, nearby the Atlantic Ocean

Source: "Zones d'Intervention."

APPENDIX D

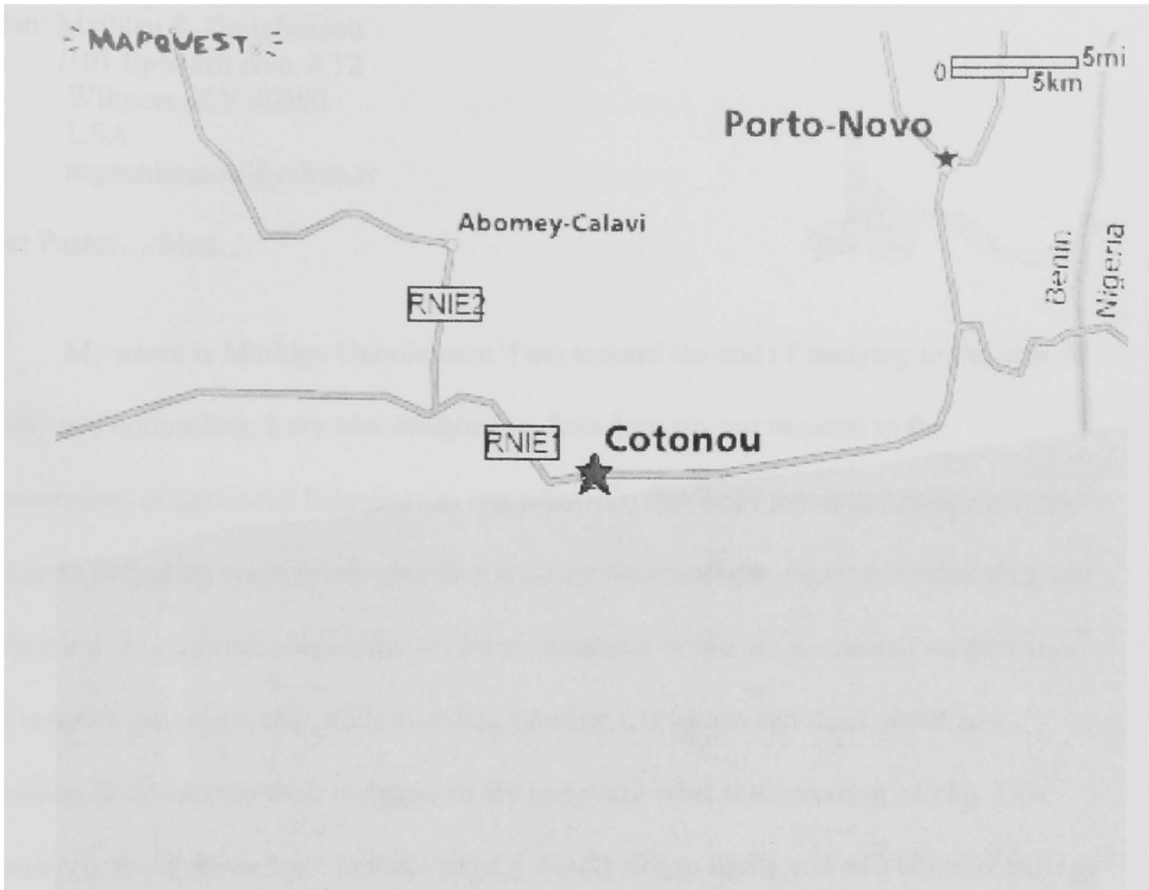
Map of Porto-Novo



Source: "Porto-Novo Map."

APPENDIX E

A View of the Distance between Cotonou and Porto-Novo



Source: **"Cotonou to Porto-Novo Map."**

APPENDIX F

Letter of First Contact with Church Leaders/Pastors

From: Mathieu S. Gnonhossou
101 Epworth Ave. # 12
Wilmore, KY 40390
USA
mgnonhossou@yahoo.fr

Dear Pastor.../Mr.....

My name is Mathieu Gnonhossou. I am toward the end of studying in the area of family and counseling. I am now studying on how best we can respond to the phenomenon of antisocial behaviors in our cities. To that end I am undertaking research that aims at finding ways urban churches are now responding to crime and what they can do beyond their current responses. As the government continues to enforce tougher legal and security measures, this study wonders whether Christians can think about how Christian faith informs their response to the issue and what that response can be. This research is being carried out in that vision. I would like to invite you as a church leader to cooperate with me in that matter. Also, I am interested in meeting three members of your congregation for the same purpose in order for the research to reflect representative church leaders' and church members' views and insights. For this reason, please, could you give me a time that best fits your schedule so we could easily discuss this matter?

√ For the purpose of this research I would love to have participants from your church who fit these categories:

√ Anyone from 18 years to 60 years old;

√ Anyone who has been member of your church for the past three years;

√ Although not necessary, anyone who has been affected (either directly or through another person such as family members) by a significant criminal act perpetrated against him or her;

√ Anyone who can represent the important views in terms of doctrines and practices that your church holds dear and fundamental.

APPENDIX G

Demographic Survey Questionnaire

Identification of Your Church

This brief questionnaire was established as an introductory engagement with you in anticipation of our upcoming phone conversation. The overall goal of my research is to identify what role(s) urban evangelical churches in Bénin can play in the fight against the growing phenomenon of antisocial behaviors in our cities. Your pastor referred me to you as a volunteer who would like to participate in this conversation. In preparation for our conversation, I invite you kindly to answer these questions in order to allow me to arrive at good results that can profit the ministry of urban evangelical churches in their participation of eradicating this social problem. The information you will share with me will only serve the purpose of my study. I assure you of our commitment to confidentiality.

I) Identification of your church:

Instruction: I would like to start by identifying your local church and some information about your church.

1- What's the name of your church?

.....

2- Which denomination, if any, is your church affiliated with?

.....

3- How long have you existed in Bénin as a denomination ?

.....

4- How long has your local church existed in this city?

.....

5- How many ministers does your local church possess?

Full-time (ordained) ministers.....
Part-time (commissioned) ministers.....
Part-time lay ministers.....
Volunteers.....
Others.....

6- About how many members form your congregation?
1-50 ☐ 51-100 ☐ 101-150 ☐ 151-200 ☐ 201-250 ☐ 251-300 ☐ 301-350 ☐ Others.....

Participant Identity

Age :.....

Profession :.....

Male ☐ .....Female☐ .....

How long have you been a member of your church ? .....

What is your role in your church? :.....

Have you ever been a victim of crime? Yes ☐ No ☐

Level of education:.....

Diplôme ☐ Certificat ☐ BEPC ☐ BAC ☐ DUEL/DUEG/DUES ☐

License ☐ Maitrise ☐ Doctorat ☐

Type of education, if any:.....

Primaire ☐ Secondaire ☐ Technique ☐ Universitaire ☐ Ecole Biblique ☐ Faculté de Théologie ☐ Autre.....

APPENDIX H

Focus Group Discussion Questions Sheet Sent to Participants

The following lines are the basic questions that we will be using during our phone group conversation. I am sending them to you in advance so that you can be familiar with them as the topics of our discussion on that day. You are encouraged to think about them ahead of time and prepare to give *your* responses or insights. As the ground rules say, there is not going to be right or wrong responses. I am interested in what you think, even if your ideas are different from the other participants'. Also be prepared to hear views or insights that may be completely different from your own, you do not need to consult with one another in order to seek harmonious responses for me on that day. Just read through these questions and begin to think about what *you* are going to say about them.

1- Can you tell me about antisocial behaviors in this city and how they affect the life and ministry of your congregation?

2- What are your comments on the role of our criminal justice system in its response to antisocial behaviors?

3- Can you tell me, considering the needs of victims and perpetrators, what is the best approach for seeking justice in the context of antisocial behaviors?

4- What types of ministries can your congregation be doing or encouraging in order to seek justice between victims and perpetrators?

5- Of all the things we have discussed during our time together, what to you has been the most important or the most enlightening?

OR

The purpose of my study was to figure out … (insert a research question). Is there something important that you think I missed considering the ideas that we discussed?

OR

I will be conducting other group discussions very shortly. What do you think I need to consider the most while discussing this issue with other groups?

Thanks for your kind collaboration

APPENDIX I

Ground Rules Sheet Sent to Participants

Please, take time to read these lines and become familiar with them. They constitute some rules that we are going to follow during our conversation in order for things to move as smoothly as possible. Some of them relate to group conversation principles while others relate to the fact that I will be on the phone at a distant place and you will be together at another location. Following these rules will allow for a very good conversation time.

□ Everyone must have copies of the basic questions and of the ground rules before the focus group interview. At the time of our conversation, you will need to have with you the general topics or questions we are going to discuss as well as the ground rules sheet that you are reading now. Do not be alarmed in case you forget them at home or in your office. Just let me know if you forgot them and my assistant will give you another copy before we proceed further during our meeting.

□ As you can see from the guiding questions you received, I will be asking a limited number of basic questions, however, we may be led to further discussion on each topic depending on where our conversations lead us. You are not required, as participating individual, to answer every question. However, I really need your voice as much as you can give me on every topic. So feel free to intervene at any time, particularly if you believe that you have an important insight or opinion that has not been expressed yet. In order for everyone to listen to your point clearly, just make sure that you request to talk so that we give you your turn because your views are very important, and we all want to hear them.

□ Note that I may call on you if I begin missing your voice. Also, because every voice is allowed, know that there is no wrong or right answer to any question. Every perception is welcome on any question. I encourage you to welcome others' points of view on a topic even if you may not agree with them. Therefore, do not hold back your thoughts for fear of being seen as wrong because there is no wrong or right answer in our discussion.

□ In order to help me take into account everyone's point of view, I am tape recording our conversation from my side of the telephone line. Be assured, however, that I am not going to attach anybody's name to a particular perception and that your ideas also will only serve for my analyses. I will be the only one who will listen to our discussion again, and it will only serve for my analyses.

□ During our discussion, you are allowed to state your name before making your comments. For instance, at your place, I would say, "my name is Mathieu. I want to suggest that our congregation could...." But you may also skip your name; it is not really compulsory to share that.

□ I would recommend that we call each other by our first names or if you have another name you feel most comfortable being called, please, let us know right now.

□ I will do a roll call based on the information you submitted to me prior to our meeting. When you hear your name, please say something about yourself. You may mention where you live or why you accord an importance to this topic, or anything you think is important to you.

APPENDIX J

Focus Group Discussion

Thank you very much for accommodating your schedule to this phone conference. I designed this interview for the purpose of identifying what role(s) urban evangelical churches in Bénin can play in the fight against the growing phenomenon of antisocial behaviors in our cities. Your pastor was so gracious to give me the privilege to carry this conversation with you. Thank you very much for volunteering your time so that I can discuss the issue that this research wants to explore with you. So, with the permission of your pastor or leader and yours, I invite you kindly to participate in this conversation in order to allow us to arrive at good results that can profit the ministry of urban evangelical churches in their participation in eradicating this social problem. The information you will share with us will only serve the purpose of our study. I assure you of our commitment to confidentiality.

Let me start by asking if you read the ground rules and are now familiar with them. If you have any questions about the ground rules we can deal with them now so that our conversation will go as smoothly as possible.

Now let's proceed with the conversation.

1- Can you tell me about antisocial behaviors in this city and how they affect the life and ministry of your congregation?

2- What are your comments on the role of our criminal justice system in its response to antisocial behaviors?

3- Can you tell me, considering the needs of victims and perpetrators, what is the best approach for seeking justice in the context of antisocial behaviors?

4- What types of ministries can your congregation be doing or encouraging in order to seek justice between victims and perpetrators?

5- Of all the things we have discussed during our time together, what to you has been the most important or the most enlightening?

OR

The purpose of my study was to figure out … (insert a research question). Is there something important that you think I missed considering the ideas that we discussed?

OR

I will be conducting other group discussions very shortly. What do you think I need to consider the most while discussing with other groups?

Thanks for your kind collaboration.

APPENDIX K

Letter of Recommendation

Mouvement Missionnaire pour l'Evangile de Christ (MMEC)
Au Sein de
L'Eglise Protestante Méthodiste du Bénin
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No 2007/2006/MISPCI/SG/DAI/SCC-ASSOC du 23 Février/République du Bénin

Décembre 2007

Objet: Lettre de Recommandation

A QUI DE DROIT

Je soussigné frère Jean-Eudes **ADJIBOITCHA**, président du Conseil Exécutif National du **Mouvement Missionnaire pour l'Evangile de Christ (MMEC)** et au nom du dit Conseil, atteste que dans le cadre de sa vision d'influencer la société avec l'Evangile, le projet de recherche conduit par le nommé Sègbégnon Gnonhossou est un projet viable pour l'œuvre du ministère évangélique dans notre pays, la République du Bénin, et est donc entièrement endossé par les membres dirigeants de notre mouvement sans réservation aucune.

Sègbégnon Gnonhossou est un membre actif de notre mouvement et se trouve maintenant en fin de formation académique; une formation qu'il désire mettre au profit de l'œuvre du Seigneur. Nous sommes témoins de sa probité, de son honnêteté et du sérieux qu'il témoigne vis-à-vis des choses du Seigneur. Pour cela nous affirmons que les garanties ont été prises par lui et notre mouvement afin de traiter les informations qu'il recevra lors de sa recherche avec la confidentialité la plus stricte possible.

Toute information qu'il recevra servira uniquement à la rédaction de son travail et rien dans ses écrits ne donnera quelque précision qui pourrait endommager la réputation de quelque église ou individu que ce soit. Son entreprise académique sert uniquement a participer à l'édification des églises évangéliques en milieu urbain dans notre pays, et pour cela nous ne pouvons qu'être reconnaissant.

Par conséquent, nous vous prions de bien vouloir donner une suite favorable à sa demande d'entreprendre son enquête auprès de vous et de votre église. Il est aussi disponible à mettre à votre disposition une copie du résumé de son travail à la fin de sa recherche, si vous le désirez.

Vous trouverez ici joint une copie de sa propre lettre d'introduction.

Le Président du Conseil Exécutif National;

Frère Jean-Eudes ADJIBOITCHA

APPENDIX L

Suggested Methods for Seeking Justice

Category or Issues Addressed	Corresponding Words
The ills of the CJ system	—Criminal justice to revisit the way it applies law in order to provide clear sentencing to those who are culpable and thus reassure victims that justice has been done to offenders through enforcement of pain proportionate to the crime; —Evangelicals must work so that the system will be run by true Christians. Only they will be able to handle crime issues in a Christian manner and in prayer; —Evangelicals need to explore and work against the deep-seated corruption in the system. For instance, insufficiency of salaries causes justice personnel to accept corruption as a way of complementing what they lack. We need to know the best way to address that issue; and, —The criminal justice personnel need to recover certain qualities that ought to characterize their works such as integrity, impartiality, equity, legality.
Offenders' Spiritual Condition	—Direct people to Scriptures believing that they can transform human behaviors. If this point is taken seriously, crimes can disappear ; —Accept Scriptures as God's means through which he can effectively work on the dysfunctions that exist in the world; —True justice will be found in the spirit of everyone involved in a crime; hence offenders' spirit must be rejuvenated; and, —Allow for those who are imprisoned to come to experience change through the means of God's word instead of leaving prison ready to commit crime again.
Victims' Care and Needs to Forgive	—Allow victims to be able to forgive and love their culprits and for offenders to come out of their sentencing transformed and nourished by God's word.
General Social Crises	—Teach and encourage believers to be involved in different societal structures (government, parliament, justice, etc.) in order to be agents of transformation by seeking to change laws and ways of operating criminal justice; —Beginning with the basics (i.e., helping people know the good benefits related to choosing to live a good life) is important. For this purpose, setting up a sort of NGO dedicated to doing this sort of educative work with the encouragement or endorsement of the justice system is important; and, —Try to engage gang groups by knowing their tactics and inform security forces so they can catch gangs effectively.

Category or Issues Addressed	Corresponding Words
Victims Offenders Reconciliation (inclusive of their networks)	—Evangelicals need to think about a ministry of assistance and mediation in the image of Paul mediating between Onesimus and Philemon. In that way, evangelicals can sacrifice in those sorts of reconciliation works that can mend victims' and offenders' broken relationships; —The church can undertake a ministry in the image of Jesus' admonition to agree with one's adversary before the matter appears in the court and ends to the victim's disadvantage (Matt. 5:25). Such a ministry will allow victims and offenders to reconcile even without going to a corrupt court; —Christians can help by creating centers for wholistic justice where provision will be made for mediation services as well as social services that tackle poverty and unemployment; —Reconstruct the traditional reconciliation ritual (*don dopko*) which is often carried out at a public place (*Avato*); and, —Work to reintegrate freed prisoners to readjust in the society and to find an alternative or additional social or family network.

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